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# The Best Non-Tribal Budget Cards in *Morningtide*

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hello everyone, and welcome back to Building on a Budget! We're still in that gap between the online release and paper release of *Morningtide*, so I'll continue to focus on broader budget issues this week and next week, then get back to playtesting two weeks from now. This week's column will be dedicated to exploring the best budget commons and uncommons in *Morningtide*, along the same lines as my column that explored [the best budget cards in Lorwyn](#). There are lot of tribal-oriented cards in *Morningtide* (moreso, by density, than in *Lorwyn*, because of the smaller set size). What I'm going to review are the commons and uncommons from this set that you'll want to play in multiple decks. Sure, you want a **Wolf-Skull Shaman** in your Elf deck, but if you're not playing Elves, what good is it? Not great, whereas there are some tribally oriented cards (which I'll get to in a short bit) that have uses outside of one specific deck.

I've broken the list below down by color—I'll review the best commons and uncommons by color, and give some ideas about how these cards could be used. This is an ideas column for the deck builders in all of us! Enough of the chit and the chat—let's take a look at the meat and potatoes of the deckbuilding gems in *Morningtide*!

## Black

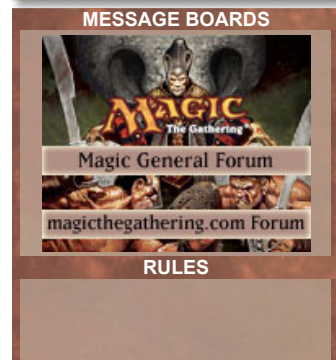
**Festercreep:** I've often complained about the lack of common and uncommon -X/-X effects in black's current repertoire. **Festercreep** is a replacement for **Nausea**, a card not seen since *Seventh Edition*. If you get other counters onto **Festercreep**, he can kill other creatures around without hurting himself (note: he gives *other* creatures -1/-1).

**Offalnsnout:** There aren't very many spot-graveyard removal spells in Standard—**Withered Wretch** and **Stonecloaker** come to mind—so having an instant-speed removal spell that doubles as a 2/2 creature is a welcome addition if you're looking to stop reanimator decks, or break up an **Academy Ruins** recursion. **Tormod's Crypt** is a three-ticket card, so this must compete with **Yixlid Jailer** and **Withered Wretch** in black decks that want to kill a card out of the graveyard for budget players.

**Oona's Blackguard:** Forget for a second that **Oona's Blackguard** works especially well with Rogues. The Blackguard's second ability (creatures with +1/+1 counters force a discard) works with non-Rogue creatures. This is especially potent with graft creatures, Spike creatures, and the modular creatures (from *Darksteel*). Turn-one **Arcbound Worker**, turn-two **Arcbound Stinger**, turn three **Oona's Blackguard** is a model for a bunch of early **Abyssal Specters**. A first-turn **Llanowar Reborn** followed by a second-turn Blackguard means you have a 2/2 Specter on the board on turn two. There are simply a ton of creatures that come into play with their own +1/+1 counters, so you don't necessarily need to be playing Rogues or Faeries (or Faerie Rogues) to take advantage of the Blackguard's "turn everything into a specter" ability.

**Weed-Pruner Poplar:** Once upon a time, there was a card named **Grandmother Sengir**. **Grandmother Sengir** lived in the banished world of Ulgrotha, where several factions of creatures had been sealed away from the rest of the **Magic** Multiverse. **Grandmother Sengir** was one-of-a-kind, and had to exert herself to make other creatures just a *little bit* smaller.

Fast forward a decade or so, and we have a non-legendary 3/3 Treefolk Assassin that duplicates the original ability of **Grandmother Sengir**, except without the tap cost. Yes, you can't do it in response to an opponent's ability. No, you can't give a creature -1/-1 on your opponent's turn. However, you can pick off a one-toughness creature or shrink a larger one each and every turn at no investment past putting a 3/3 five-drop creature onto the board. Want to frustrate someone playing **Bitterblossom**? Just drop down the Poplar, and watch your opponent start losing 4 life a turn (1 from their Blossom, 4 from your swingin' tree).



## Blue

**Disperse:** Blue and green have a weird relationship in which blue often takes some of the best green cards, and splashes them into primarily blue decks. **Disperse** allows green (and other colors) to return the favor by giving them a non-land-hitting **Boomerang** as the same cost as **Boomerang**, except at a much less stringent color requirement. This is not nearly as good as **Boomerang** if you're mono-blue, since often you'll want to **Boomerang** a land card (man lands, lands enchanted with **Fertile Ground**, bouncelands, storage lands). However, it does act as a great tempo card, and probably more worth playing than **Unsummon** as a splash card. It can take out problematic enchantments and artifacts for a turn (**Story Circle**, **Ensnaring Bridge**), without the need for a heavy commitment to blue.

**Distant Melody:** How does this compare to other four-drop card-drawing cards? If you're not playing a tribally oriented deck, this is worse than almost any other alternative (you don't want to invest four mana at sorcery speed to draw one to two cards). However, this is an omni-tribal card—it works with any tribe out there, as long as you *have* a tribe. Want to play this with Merfolk, where you can partner it with **Stonybrook Schoolmaster** and **Summon the School**? Go ahead! Want to go nuts with **Mogg War Marshal** and **Weirding Shaman**? My best wishes to you! Got five **Forests** and an **Ambush Commander**? Drop an **Island**, name Elves, and draw six cards! There are a lot of ways to put 3+ creatures into play at once, so **Distant Melody**, in the properly constructed deck, can end up being better than **Harmonize** / **Concentrate**.

**Merrow Witsniper:** I just wanted to note that this guy is really, really good against opponents who rely on Harbingers. However, this guy really wanted the flash ability to play against end-of-turn instant-speed tutors (**Enlightened Tutor**, **Vampiric Tutor**), in which case he would have been playable in multiple formats, and not just casual. Still, if Harbingers are popular where you play, the Witsniper will prove frustrating to your playmates.

**Mothdust Changeling:** This is the cheapest changeling of all by mana cost, meaning that if you just *have* to plop down a certain tribe on turn one, especially if you're running multiple tribes down the road, this is your earliest option for a **Mistform Ultimus**-type creature. On a side-note (and this is for one particular tribe), it gives you an outlet to tap your own Merfolk if you're going that route—one of the few early-drops that will allow you to tap as many Merfolk as you'd like per turn.

**Negate:** Everyone plays with noncreature spells. Fine, maybe someone has their all-Sliver deck where there's nary a **Hivestone** in sight, they don't have any mana fixers like **Fertile Ground** or **Search for Tomorrow**, and they'll beat you down with **Venser's Sliver** and **Root Sliver**. But for everyone else, there's enchantments, sorceries, instants, and artifacts all around. **Negate** is inverse **Remove Soul**—it is **Annul**, **Envelop** and **Flash Counter** rolled into one card, at the low (splashable) cost of only a blue and one.

This is the first staple card on this list—a card which you simply have to own if you like playing blue decks. The other cards above can be used in multiple decks, but there are, for instance, some blue decks where you wouldn't consider **Distant Melody**, or some black decks that wouldn't need **Oona's Blackguard**. What makes **Negate** a staple card is that *any* blue deck you're running could conceivably play **Negate**—it's just a matter of whether or not you *want* to play it in that particular deck.

**Sage of Fables:** This is similar to **Oona's Blackguard** in that you don't need to be playing Wizards to take advantage of the second ability of **Sage of Fables**—as long as you have creatures with +1/+1 counters, you can pay 2 to draw a card. **Vigean Hydropon** turns into a really cheap **Jayemdae Tome**, for example.

**Thieves' Fortune:** Card selection cards have been hit-or-miss over the years—**Telling Time** hasn't been very popular as of late, and **Sleight of Hand**, **Opt**, and **Serum Visions** aren't in Standard right now. **Thieves' Fortune** is a tweak on **Impulse**, one of the most popular card-selection cards of all time. Even without the proul cost, the Fortune can find a home in blue decks that want to find an answer, and now. This isn't as good as the extremely played **Court Hussar**, since it cannot be recurred using bounce or **Momentary Blink** (which, I may note, is one of the most popular budget cards of all time at this point!). It is still worth considering, since it can be used end-of-turn to dig down four cards into your deck, allowing you to keep from tapping out on your opponent's turn.

## Green

**Deglamer:** There are a lot of players who hate **Millstone**-type effects. When they see a certain card they want/need/like get sent straight from the top of their library to the graveyard, it causes a lot of anxiety, a sometimes a little unpleasant language. **Haberdash** and **Bologna**, my good man! Most one-on-one games of **Magic** end with each person having seen less than half of their deck, so it is mostly luck if any one given card is in any one given place in your library at any one given time. Until you draw a card (unless you have used library manipulation), the top card of your library has an equal chance to be any card remaining in your library.

This is where **Deglamer** shines. Tired of your opponent recurring artifacts with **Academy Ruins**? Don't want that **Opposition** coming back with **Eternal Witness**? Use **Deglamer** to get your opponent's artichantment out of the way for (probably) good and back into their deck. If they're not running a lot of tutoring effects, chances are you're doing more good than harm. This is a great alternative for **Naturalize** if you expect a lot of graveyard recursion in your playgroup or metagame.



Here's an interesting exercise to try when you're playing offline, assuming you use protective sleeves and you're playing against friends (don't try this in a tournament—it's illegal!). Play **Deglamer**, and before your opponent shuffles that card into his library, just take a tiny sliver of paper and slip it into that card's sleeve. Continue playing the game, and see if your opponent ever draws that particular copy of that card. You want that paper in there to make sure it's that *one* specific copy of that card, and not one of the other three copies they are running.

Chances are, with 40-50 cards remaining in their deck, that you'll never see that card again. The mind plays tricks—if you saw any version of that card later in the game, you'd assume "oh man, I shouldn't have shuffled that card back into his library—he just had a better chance of drawing it!", but the one copy of that card has only a 1/50 (or 1/40 or one-in-however-many-cards-they-have-left-in-their-deck) chance of being drawn in any given draw step, so each turn gives only a 2-3% chance of seeing that card again. Cumulatively this adds up just a little, but mathematically, shuffling that card into your opponent's deck doesn't really do you much harm.

**Fertilid**: When I first saw this card, I was blown away—not because it's a huge heavy hitter (it's not going to be winning any awards for serious tournament play), but because this is perfect for more casual green decks. It's a 2/2 that can block, trade with a creature, and double **Rampant Growth**! This is what Pauper decks are made of—creatures that can provide three-for-one card advantage in a reasonable situation. This isn't as good as **Fertile Ground** or **Llanowar Elves** (or previous contenders **Sakura-Tribe Elder** or **Kodama's Reach**) if you're strictly looking to accelerate, but it is great for many, many budget green decks—those that want to get domain (one of each land type), those that want to accelerate their number of **Forests** in play (**Blanchwood Armor**), or those that just want a splash color.

Special **Fertilid** Note: Did you notice that **Fertilid** targets a player? If you're playing in a group game (Two-Headed Giant, anyone?), you can accelerate your *teammate* on mana, making this one of the few cards which allows you to provide extra mana to players on your team!

**Hunting Triad**: Flexability is the key here—you're getting either three 1/1 creatures (which is great if you care about creature count, like with **Distant Melody**, or if you have a pumper like **Imperious Perfect**), or a permanent +3/+3 boost to a single creature. There are situations where you would want either/or, so think of the Triad as a split-up **Hill Giant** that can occasionally double as a permanent **Giant Growth** effect.

**Lys Alana Bowmaster**: "187" creatures are creatures that come into play and kill something—**Nekrataal**, **Shriekmaw**, and the like. Usually green's 187 creatures are limited to artifact-killing effects (**Viridian Shaman**, **Uktabi Orangutan**). In this case, green gets a creature that can 187 small flyers—not insignificant in a world of **Faeries** and **MulldrifTERS**. Even outside of any sort of dedicated Elf deck, Bowmaster is a great creature if you're expecting to face a lot of small flyers in your new future.

**Recross the Paths**: This is a strange mana accelerant, in multiple ways—it puts lands into play untapped (usually searchers put lands into play tapped), it can fetch nonbasic lands (usually green spells of this sort only get basic lands), and it's reusable. It's reusable in that you need to win the clash to play it again—but if you do, you can accelerate your deck pretty rapidly. Turn three: **Recross the Paths** (four lands). Turn four: play a land (five Lands), play **Recross the Paths** (six lands), play **Recross the Paths** (seven lands). If you're running a high-mana-cost deck (which you might very well be, if you're hitting eight lands in play on turn eight), chances are you can win the clash against your opponent.

## Red

**Release the Ants**: This is the other reusable clash card that I'd recommend for the casual player. This differs from **Recross the Paths** in that you can keep the same card on top of your library after each clash (**Recross the Paths** makes you dig down into your deck for lands, so you can't keep the same card on top of your library each turn). If you're set up to win the clash, though, **Release the Ants** (which is notably an instant) is a great buyback spot-removal spell. Compare this to something like **Searing Touch**—instead of a five-mana investment to deal 1 damage, you're investing two mana. It is very reasonable to think that you could reach six mana with **Release the Ants** in play, and effectively have an Arc Lightning-a-turn as long as you can win the clash—and I'd pay six mana to be able to have a recurring **Incinerate** each turn, at my leisure!

**Shard Volley**: One in a long line of **Lightning Bolt** replacements with a drawback. This isn't quite as good as **Rift Bolt** (one turn is probably a better cost than a mandatory one land), but it is definitely worth running if A) you want to get lands into your graveyard, B) you want another extremely efficient burn spell for your weenie rush deck, or C) you want another extremely efficient burn spell for your burn deck.

**Spitebellows**: Compare this to **Shriekmaw**. It evokes for just one more mana and costs one more mana to cast, but it can hit a whole slew more creatures than **Shriekmaw** (artifact and black creatures) and hits for a lot more than **Shriekmaw** if it gets on the board. That one mana makes a huge difference to make **Shriekmaw** a better card overall (especially since it is splashable—**Spitebellows** requires more of a red commitment), but it is comparable enough that budget players will want to take notice of this guy.



## White

**Mosquito Guard:** White Weenie decks are a little short on one-drops since **Savannah Lions** and **Isamaru, Hound of Konda** left the environment—and plus, both of those were rare. **Mosquito Guards** is a strict upgrade over **Tundra Wolves**—not only do you get a 1/1 first striker for **\***, but you also get the option of growing your other creatures late in the game, when a 1/1 creature might not be a great board investment.

**Redeem the Lost:** I've always been a fan of these sorts of effects—**Flickering Ward**, **Blessed Breath**—because they are so versatile. I'd much rather have this than **Rebuff the Wicked**, because there are more instances where **Redeem the Lost** will be useful (preventing global damage spells like **Pyroclasm**, messing up combat damage during a block) and most targeted removal spells that **Rebuff the Wicked** would stop would be prevented by giving a creature protection from that color as well. **Rebuff the Wicked** doesn't stop effects from hitting a creature—**Redeem the Lost** does. Even if you don't win the clash, **Redeem the Lost** will probably act as a counterspell against whatever your opponent is throwing against your board. If you win the clash, it's just a major bonus!



## Artifact

**Thornbite Staff:** Just a quick note that **Thornbite Staff** is great on any creature that gives you an effect for damaging an opponent or an opponent's creature. Any creature with deathtouch will instantly turn into a Gatling gun when equipped with **Thornbite Staff**. **Thieving Magpie** starts drawing cards without having to swing for an attack. It has a high equip cost if you're not running Shamans, but that equip cost is worth it if you can have a creature that takes out an entire weenie horde. Put **Thornbite Staff** on **Sengir Vampire** and watch him grow to epic proportions!

I hope that this column has given the budget deckbuilders out there some ideas for some of the good *Morningtide* commons and uncommons that aren't necessarily tied to the tribal theme! There are cards here that are certainly going to show up in deck evolutions down the road in this very column. Speaking of deck evolutions, I had you guys (and gals) vote on which of the five Lost Tribes of *Morningtide* you'd like to see me evolve into a deck. Here's how that vote went!

Which deck would you most like to see me evolve in a future column?		
Assassins (The Silent Killers)	2790	25.4%
Knights (Good Knight to You)	2474	22.5%
Druids (Land Grab)	2430	22.1%
Archers (What Goes Up...)	1894	17.2%
Clerics (Prevent This!)	1397	12.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>10985</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

See you in seven!

Ben

*Ben Bleiweiss has written about his obsession with **Magic: The Gathering** for over a decade. He's travelled the world because of **Magic**, both as a player and a writer. When not spending time playing **Magic**, writing about **Magic**, or thinking about **Magic**, Ben is employed by [StarCityGames.com](http://StarCityGames.com), where he works with **Magic** cards all day long. He lives with his wife in Virginia, and they sleep comfortably at night under their Orgg down comforter.*



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