

# General Strategy

What do you do when your strongest unit is attacked? Why does it matter what you spend your dice on? These articles can provide guidance on how to build a strategy for every deck you play.

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# Exploring the Resource 'Curve' in Ashes Reborn Flat Argiaia'er Theory

• June 15, 2022

*Hard 30 – Beyond the First Five – part I*

## It's Not a Curve

Using a bell curve to optimize resources for card games has been around for over 30 years. The concept helps you play the greatest number of cards during a round based on increasing resources. Ashes is a different bird altogether because your resources are set. Instead of an ever expanding curve you have an average.

The first thing you want to figure out is how many repeatable effects do you want to trigger every round. Either from a phoenixborn's ability or spellbooks already in play. Take the total cost of those effects minus ten. That is the amount of **open dice** available every round to spend on any other cards you may draw.

The second thing is deciding what you want your average cost of card to be in your deck. This is a drastically different approach than other games due to the set resources. Instead of your curve being dictated to you, you choose your average.

## Five In, X Out Theory

Ideally during round two you activate all your spellbooks, phoenixborn ability, and play all the cards you think are key to the deck concept. In most card games the goal is to play every single card you draw to the battlefield. So, if you draw five cards, you want to play five cards. Generally known as

five in, five out.

Ashes presents several barriers to that idea. First of all there is a limit to your resources of ten dice. No less, no more. Second, phoenixborn have battlefield sizes. Even if you drew five allies they may not all fit within limit. Finally, you just may not be able to. Some cards require a trigger for them to be useful. The caveat for the last point is if a particular card keeps being the last piece of cardboard in your hand... It might be time for a new card.

Each deck has an interesting balance for the number of cards it wants to play each turn based on the first five.

If a deck has a low number of open dice, like three, it makes sense to aim for three or less cards being played each turn. Your deck should have an incredibly low average cost of one. Interestingly, it makes cards with detrimental discards all the more palatable like Crescendo since you are going to be holding cards at the end of the turn.

## Finding Your Average

Find your average by dividing the number of open dice by the number of cards you want to play each round.

Open Dice/X Out = Average Cost of Card

The average cost of a card is for the rest of the 25 in your deck. To make this easier to visualize, figure out the cost combination of each card in a five card hand that meets or exceeds your X Out number. NOTE: I have not included zero cost cards. They are not worth playing in a deck besides Call Upon the Realms. Royal Charm can be great but you need to be in charm or divine. The less said about Mass Heal\* the better.

\*Please prove me wrong! I love seeing underused cards rise to the occasion!

Example 1: I have a deck with with five open dice and I want to play three cards per round. Five divided by three is 1.66 repeating. What would that look like in a five card hand? Remember, three cards have to add up to five or less die cost to meet our criteria.

“ Cost    1 2 3 4

Hand 1 - 3 0 0 0

Hand 2 - 4 0 0 0

Hand 3 - 5 0 0 0

Hand 4 - 2 2 0 0

Hand 5 - 3 1 0 0

Hand 6 - 1 2 0 0

Hand 7 - 2 0 1 0

There are a lot of options for different hands.

Example 2: Let's take the same number of open dice, five. But, increase the number of cards I want to play each turn to five.

“ Cost 1 2 3 4

Hand 1 - 5 0 0 0

That's it. No card can cost more than one.

How do you know how many cards you should play in a round? Well, that depends on your deck.

## Choosing Your X Out

Here's where you can flex your creativity. When picking a deck concept you usually have a couple other cards you envision pairing with the first five. Make sure you can play those on any given turn without modifying your regular lines of play. If you have to sacrifice a repeatable effect you are relying on, rethink your supporting 25.

To make room for your supporting cards work them into the average. Let's continue with the premise that your deck has five open dice and the supporting card is a cost three, Essence Druid. That leaves you with two open dice. The best you could do is playing three total cards this round.

You are limited to only playing a possible three cards per turn on the round you want to play your best supporting card. The rest of the deck has to be one cost cards with a couple two costs thrown in for the rounds you don't draw Essence Druid. The deck pretty much chose for you X Out of three.

There is nothing wrong with picking a lower X Out number. It just means your spellbooks and phoenixborn are doing all the heavy lifting and you are cherry picking the best one or two support cards to play each turn. Some of the best decks rely on four conjurations to hold down the battlefield with only a couple support cards each round.

Pushing the boundaries of five in, x out can also reap interesting results. Without having a solid concept I was curious if I could make an effective five in, seven out deck. The deck was crammed with one cost allies, burn, and card draw. It has given me my highest win percentage of any new deck I have created. My next experiment is going to be five in, one out (probably has to be two). I think those may already exist with Koji Creepers and Meoni Snek. I recently saw an iteration with Saria's raven, gryphon, false demon, and resummon. A whopping nine dice are dedicated to the spell board.

The goal of choosing the right X Out number is to give you the most flexibility to play with a repeating first five. You can tell when it's not working when you consistently have dice left unused and you skip using a repeatable ability or conjuration. One of your issues might be you don't have the right dice. Next on Beyond the First Five. Until then hey and gl!

# Dice efficiency in Ashes: Reborn

Originally published at <https://beckism.com/2021/11/dice-efficiency-in-ashes-reborn/> on **Nov. 13, 2021**; archived Jan. 9, 2023.

Often times when people ask about how to win in Ashes Reborn, experienced players will tell them, “Use your dice more efficiently than your opponent.” However, because units and spells can exist on the board from round to round, it can be difficult to easily identify what constitutes an efficient use of dice.

Understanding dice efficiency is further complicated by the fact that you have to consider outcomes vis-à-vis your opponent; whenever you’re talking about dice efficiency, it’s with relation to how your opponent has spent their dice.

Lastly, before I get into the nitty gritty of evaluating outcomes for their dice efficiency, I want to also mention that while efficiently dealing damage is extremely important, it’s not the only thing that will win games. Smart sequencing, tempo plays, and gaining higher utility from your cards compared to your opponent all play a part, as well. This is simply one piece of the puzzle.

## Damage vs. utility

Cards in Ashes tend to do one (or more) of three things:

1. Deal damage (attack values on units, direct damage)
2. Prevent or mitigate taking damage (life value on units, healing, destruction effects)
3. Offer a utility effect (adjust dice, manipulate exhaustion, etc.)

There are a lot of different utility effects, and they can be very difficult to evaluate from the standpoint of dice efficiency. Utility effects often show their worth through play, and sometimes only if you use the correct play line (or situation) for them. As a result, while I can help coach you through evaluating dice efficiency, learning which utility effects you need and prefer will require playing the game. Smart deck building and play can allow you to use cards the community generally considers inefficient to great effect by compounding utility effects.

(Incidentally, if you’re ever wondering why “decks full of units” are so popular in Ashes: it’s because units often do all three of the things above! They deal damage by attacking or countering,

prevent damage to your Phoenixborn by blocking or encouraging your opponent to attack them, and usually have some utility effect.)

With that out of the way, let's take a look at the starting point for evaluating your damage-to-dice efficiency!

## Base damage output

The starting point for calculating dice efficiency is to look at your base damage output. This is situational, but at the most simplistic you can boil it down to “how many wounds—or wound equivalents—does this card cause compared to how many dice it costs?” For instance:

- [Frost Bite](#) is a Ready Spell that deals 1 damage for 1 die; this is a 1-to-1 ratio
- [Final Cry](#) is a spell that deals 2 damage to your opponent for 1 die; this is a 2-to-1 ratio

This actually illustrates the full range of base damage output in Ashes! (Some cards have ratios below 1-to-1, but they typically have some utility effect that complicates calculating their actual value.)

There are also some cards like [Summon Frostback Bear](#) that have a “book tax”: a play cost that is effectively amortized across the total number of conjurations you summon all game. In this instance, if you only summon 1 [Frostback Bear](#), it costs 3 dice (2 damage to 3 dice). But if you summon two, they effectively cost 2.5 dice each, and so on. Since the book tax typically only impacts your First Five, most people round it to zero for subsequent summons—so a Frostback Bear effectively costs 2 dice, for your standard base damage output of 1 damage to 1 die.

However, base damage output is merely a starting place! To calculate your actual dice efficiency, you have to look at outcomes.

## Calculating dice efficiency through outcomes

To calculate the dice efficiency of a card, you need to consider its total outcome: that is, how many wounds it dealt and was dealt until it was destroyed. Note that there's a difference between wounds and damage in Ashes! Base damage is how much damage the unit is capable of outputting in a simple attack to the Phoenixborn compared to how much dice you spent. Dice efficiency is more about how many *wounds* the unit actually places, though.

For instance, say I summon a [Hammer Knight](#). Its base damage-to-dice ratio is 3-to-3. However, if you respond by playing [Sword of Virtue](#) to destroy my Hammer Knight before I have a chance to attack with it, then I have spent 3 dice to deal 0 wounds, and you have spent 2 dice to effectively deal 4 wounds (since that's how much damage the Hammer Knight would normally take to destroy).

That scenario is pretty easy to intuit the efficiency ("I spent 3 dice, you spent 2 dice, and we're back where we started, so you were more efficient."). Things start to get complicated when both players are dealing damage, however.

For a second scenario, say I have a Hammer Knight, and you have a ready Frostback Bear and an exhausted [Mist Spirit](#) that attacked on a previous turn (this is the first round, so the Frostback Bear costs 3, including the book tax). I attack the Frostback Bear and deal it 3 damage to destroy it, while it deals 2 counter damage back. I then use the Hammer Knight's Aftershock ability to deal 1 damage to the Mist Spirit. In this instance, I have spent 3 dice for 4 wounds, while you have spent 4 dice for 3 wounds (two from the Bear's counter, and 1 from the initial attack from the Mist Spirit). My efficiency is slightly better, but *more importantly* we are not done with the Hammer Knight's outcome, because the Hammer Knight is still in play. For instance, you might use [Aradel's Water Blast](#) ability to deal 2 more damage to the Knight, killing it. That makes the final outcome 4 wounds to 3 dice (1.33) for me and 5 wounds for 4 dice for you (1.25): my efficiency was slightly better, because I have a slightly higher ratio. If you subtract the two ratios, you end up with 0.08; so you could say that in that exchange I was ahead by about a tenth of a wound.

The reason that knights are so popular, however, is because that minor efficiency improvement is usually the floor for Knights (barring hard removal, as described above). If you don't have Water Blast (or an equivalent way to kill the Knight) and the round ends, then the outcome is a lot worse for you because the Knight's recover 2 value clears off your two wounds and I get to use my Knight again.

For argument's sake, let's say that happens and you attack the Knight with a Frostback Bear, then use Water Blast to kill it. At this point, my efficiency is 7 wounds for 3 dice (4 in first round, 3 in counter damage to kill the Bear this round), or 2.33. Your dice efficiency is 5 wounds for 7 dice (1 in first round from Mist Spirit, since the Bear's wounds were wiped out by Recovery; then 4 from the Bear and Water Blast this round), or 0.71. Subtract those two numbers and you get 1.62: I was ahead by over one and a half wounds! That sort of thing adds up, because there's only so many wounds you can soak up with your dice (and available conjurations or units from hand) before I start converting that damage into damage on your Phoenixborn.

## Messing with your opponent's outcomes



In the examples above, all damage being dealt was the perfect amount to destroy a unit (or not). But much of the time that won't be the case. You can increase your dice efficiency by ensuring that your units output as close to their full damage as possible, while your opponent's units waste their potential damage output.

For instance, if I play a Hammer Knight, and you attack it with two [Shadow Spirits](#) (across subsequent turns), my efficiency is 2 wounds for 3 dice (each Shadow Spirit only has 1 life and the Hammer Knight remains ready after countering)—0.67—while your efficiency is 4 wounds for 2 dice—2. That's a difference of 1.33 wounds in your favor!

By making smart choices about which units to block or guard and which to attack, you can maximize the wound output from your units and minimize the output from your opponent's units to increase your relative dice efficiency.

## Why dice efficiency matters, even when it's from wounds dealt to units

Ultimately, the only damage that matters is damage dealt to your opponent's Phoenixborn, but because dice, cards, and the number of units available to you are finite resources, considering the dice efficiency with which your deck can handle various scenarios is important. There is an opportunity cost to playing and attacking with units, which is one of the reasons Alert knights are so played so widely. Although they have a relatively high dice cost, they make up for it by potentially killing off a bunch of your opponent's units (and, in severely disadvantageous matchups, ultimately swinging to face, as well). Additionally, decks can only put so much attack, damage, and life on the board each round, and efficiently dealing with what your opponent has played can allow you to build up very big dice efficiency differentials simply when your units persist to a new round and swing again.

## Practical applications for calculating dice efficiency

Exactly calculating your dice efficiency in the middle of a game of Ashes like I've done in the examples above isn't a useful endeavor. However, considering dice efficiency can be very important during deck construction, before games when you know your opponent's list (to determine your ideal play lines), and after games (to understand where your play lines or deck

building choices might need to change to improve your outcomes).

For instance, at the time of this writing I just finished playing a Noah deck in the 2021 Shufflebus 5 tournament which fielded mostly several 2/1 conjurations that cost 1 die each. Doing some simple efficiency outcome calculations, I can determine what books are optimal to lock down with Noah's Shadow Target ability to avoid inefficient trades. I faced a deck that was running [Summon Turtle Guard](#) and [Summon Ruby Cobra](#). From an efficiency standpoint:

- If they attack a 2/1 with the [Ruby Cobra](#), they spend 1 die for 1 damage (and a mill, which is a utility effect that is difficult to value under this framework) and I spend 1 die for 2 damage. We basically break even there, so there's not much reason to worry about locking down that book, and if I attack it I kill it and leave an exhausted 2/1 unit behind (which requires them to expend more resources to destroy, improving my efficiency).
- [Turtle Guard](#) is less simple, because it has Recover 1 and is effectively immune to damage while exhausted. So they play it for 2 dice (1 for the book tax), I attack with a 2/1, then the round turns over and I attack it with a second 2/1 to kill it. That's 3 wounds for 2 dice for me (1.33) and 2 wounds for 2 dice for them (1). On paper that looks to be slightly in my favor, but because Turtle Guard has Unit Guard that means I don't get to decide where the damage goes (they effectively get 2 free guard actions, which is a big deal if I need to efficiently deal damage). Subsequent Turtle Guards only cost 1 die, too, so the same pattern repeated in the second round would mean their efficiency is 2 wounds for 1 die, and mine would be 3 for 2 (plus all the same efficiency costs). That means locking down Turtle Guard with Noah's ability was a high priority for me.

Those particular examples are kind of obvious, but hopefully illustrate the concept. You can also consider the opposite: why did my opponent choose those two books?

- Ruby Cobra is a 1/2 unit on attack, or a 0/2 unit on defense. For decks that *aren't* running 2/1 units (my deck is an outlier in that regard; in the online meta as of this writing it's an unusual statline to see), that means that a likely outcome for the Cobra is to deal 1 wound for 1 die (a low baseline damage, but consider it also has a utility effect), but then require 1-2 dice spent by your opponent to kill it (or it might soak up a Knight swing, causing them to waste a potential wound).
- Turtle Guard is a 2/3 unit that can't attack, which effectively costs 1 die (disregarding the book tax). That makes it very difficult to kill by anything *except* Knights, with whom it trades beautifully (it deals damage equal to half a typical Knight's health, making it much easier to efficiently kill the Knight).

These less specific "good enough" calculations are typically how most players think about dice efficiency. Tracing specific, full outcomes is often too difficult, very specific to individual match-ups, and is complicated by the fact that dice efficiency is a constantly evolving thing; in a way, the true "outcome" would have to be tracking efficiency from the very start to the very end of the game, because it's very common for highly efficient outcomes to be turned on their head (for instance, perhaps I efficiently kill a Hammer Knight with my 2/1 units only to have my opponent play a

*second* Hammer Knight that wrecks me with Aftershock damage and survives to the next round). Examining specific outcomes can hopefully help lead to a more general understanding of efficiency, however.

# Dice efficiency isn't everything

I mentioned it earlier, but it bears re-iteration: dice efficiency isn't everything! Simply collecting all the most efficient units in a single deck won't necessarily win you games; timing, smart play, and exploiting utility effects that work well together are all incredibly important parts of Ashes, as well. However, gaining an understanding of what constitutes dice efficiency will definitely help improve your ability to construct decks and make smart choices in game, so it's worth thinking about.

Good luck and have fun!

# What is "Tempo"?

## Intro

[Get me to the interesting stuff!](#)

Tempo is a frequently used term in card gaming and, I think, one of the most important and intuitive concepts in strategy, with application far outside card games. However, often, when we look into it further its meaning becomes unclear or multiple conflicting definitions surface. I think the term is generally understood intuitively but is difficult to comprehend concretely.

I would like to set out own definition of what tempo is, and my thoughts on its importance in strategy. I expect there will many definitions and thoughts that conflict with my own due to the ill defined nature of the term.

My own thoughts are informed primarily from my own experiences playing games and thinking about strategy, with a small amount of research done for this article, so I hope you will be able to use my thoughts to inform your own, whether you agree with them or not, and vice versa.

- Hale

## So What Is It?

To me, tempo tells us which player is the attacker and which is the defender at any given point in a game.

Often during a game, one player will be in a stronger position to attack their opponent, and the other is therefore forced into a defensive position. The defender is forced to play reactively, spending resources to prevent the threat that the attacker has just presented, while making only limited progress toward threatening them.

On the other hand, the attacker is is not being threatened by the defender, they are able to keep the progress the have already made toward victory by presenting new threats that must be answered and if they go unanswered gain even further.

In this situation the 'tempo' is held by the attacker, allowing them to dictate the pace of the game and force their opponent to respond to their plays.

Of course, in many cases, the tempo can shift significantly with the play of a single card. And in a close game the tempo may shift back and forth with every one or two turns as each player answers their opponent's threat while playing their own.

## A bit of History:

The term 'tempo' in card games originates in Magic the Gathering, having been ported over from chess before that.

In order to describe tempo Chess.com states:

“

"When you successfully move your piece to a good square and force your opponent to stop their original plan to defend against your newly created threat, you have gained a tempo."

I think this description fits quite well into how the terminology is understood in card games as well, at least intuitively, if not always concretely.

## Other Uses of the Term

Tempo is also often used to describe plays, cards, and decks as well. These descriptions generally refer to a large gain in tempo.

- A high tempo play may swing the game significantly in one player's favor.
- A high tempo card may be able to produce high tempo plays more consistently than a low tempo one.
- A tempo deck may also be able to consistently produce large swings in tempo compared to other decks, and may specifically rely on these large swings in tempo to win.

However, describing cards and decks in this way is often very tricky, if not entirely impractical, in my opinion. To me, tempo is inherently a state of the game, not inherent to a deck or card. So whether those decks of cards actually produce the tempo they are described as having is highly situational and dependent on the particular game.

For example, I expect most people would consider Summon Sleeping Widows a high tempo card. However, while it can produce a large tempo advantage when played, it can also be played defensively, or simply for the value of two bodies from one card.

Similarly, Guilt Link is a card that I expect would generally be considered a value generating engine. But, probably the highest tempo play I have ever made was playing two copies of Guilt Link back-to-back. Simply because my opponent's board state was such that they could not afford to attack into it, which countered their immediate threat of attack while also developing the ready spells for use later.

Tempo is control over the pace of the game.

Which player is able to play proactively and which can only react to their opponents play.

Having the tempo means you can set the pace, the beat, the rhythm of the game. You force your opponent to dance to your tempo rather than dancing to theirs.

It is a position of power and control over the game, although often fragile and quick to change hands.

# Archetypal strategies in Ashes: Reborn

Originally published at <https://beckism.com/2021/04/archetypal-strategies-in-ashes-reborn/> on **April 8, 2021**; archived Jan. 9, 2023.

*Some folks on the Ashes Community Discord ([join here](#)) were recently talking about how the game needs its own terminology to describe common deck archetypes. I love developing terminology. You can do the math. (I'd have posted this on Ashes.live, but I haven't re-implemented the posts functionality...so here we are.)*

*Please note that this article assumes familiarity with Ashes cards and gameplay. If you are new to the game, you should probably start with the [Watch It Played video](#) or similar.*

## Conceptualizing deck strategies in Ashes Reborn

A lot of people like to use terms like “burn”, “mill”, and “swing” to describe decks in Ashes, but because of Ashes’ unique structure these terms often fail to capture what actually makes a given Ashes deck unique.

Let’s take a look at some of the core strategies that make up Ashes decks, and how they map onto the common, Magic: the Gathering-based terminology that most people use to describe archetypes!

## What’s your win condition?

The most common question raised when a user posts a deck for feedback is “What’s your win con?” This is kind of a misleading question in Ashes, because there’s only one actual win condition: dealing lethal damage to your opponent’s Phoenixborn.

What is *meant* by this question is “what is your primary source of damage?”, and in Ashes there are three broad categories:

1. **Attack damage** (this comes in several flavors, which we’ll explore in a bit)
2. **Direct damage** from spells and abilities (commonly referred to as “burn”)
3. **Fatigue damage** dealt at the top of the round when they have to draw and have no cards in their deck (commonly referred to as “mill” damage, after an archetype in Magic that used a card called Millstone to discard cards from the opponent’s deck)

Thanks to the widespread use of terms like “burn” and “mill”, players often assume that the sources of damage above are deck archetypes. There’s certainly nothing wrong with trying to do something quirky like make a deck that deals the vast majority of its damage directly through spells and abilities, of course, but it is far more common for decks in Ashes to rely on multiple sources of damage.

This is because in Ashes, the battlefield is omnipresent.

## How do you manage the battlefield?

In many competitive card battle games, you have two basic resources: whatever you spend to play cards, and the cards themselves. One or both typically relies on luck of the draw, which means in those games, you can attack the units your opponent plays, or discard those units from their hand, or discard/destroy the resources they use to summon those units, even if you don’t really want to play units yourself. In Ashes, both players always have access to 10 dice per round, and thanks to the First Five and Ready Spells that summon units you can guarantee permanent access to battlefield presence.

It’s still possible to mess with your opponent—you can force them to discard cards, spin down their dice, exhaust their spellboard cards, etc.—but if they want to play units, there’s not really a lot you can do to fully stop that. And since units are an easy source of damage (through attacking) and simultaneously a strong defense (through blocking), they most likely *will* be playing units.

This means that after figuring out what your primary source of damage is, you need to figure out how you’re going to manage the battlefield. Because it takes two people to battle, there are two sides to this question. For your own battlefield you can:

- **Refill:** play units, then when they die play them again (e.g. using a Ready Spell or Ceremonial dice power recursion). This strategy can range from playing a single copy of a spellbook so that you always have one copy of a particular conjuration each round, to running multiple copies so that you can ramp up production in later rounds.
- **Refresh:** there are two ways to refresh your battlefield: you can play cards that remove exhaustion from your units (allowing a single threat to act twice in a round), or play cards



that *destroy* your units so that you can replace them with something else. It might seem a little weird to group these seemingly disparate actions into a single strategy, but they boil down to the same thing: you spend some resources to leverage the same battlefield slot more than once in a round.

- **Recover:** sink more resources into units that are difficult to kill in hopes of building up advantage when they survive to the next round. Units meant to recover are often the “knights” (a “knight” in Ashes is a unit that costs one power die, one class die, and one basic die; referred to as knights because a lot of them are actual knights: [Hammer Knight](#), [Celestial Knight](#), [Holy Knight](#), etc.), or units paired with strong defensive alterations like [Root Armor](#).

And the main things you can do to your opponent’s battlefield are:

- **Clear:** kill their stuff. Area of effect (AOE) spells like [Nature’s Wrath](#) and [Meteor](#) can wipe entire boards. Units with the Alert skill can kill multiple attackers each round.
- **Clog:** why play more units when you can just clog up your opponent’s battlefield? The most common clog strategy relies on exhausting your opponent’s units ([Kneel](#), [Blood Chains](#), etc.), although chump blocking attackers with units that are much cheaper is arguably a clogging strategy, as well.

How you want to manage the battlefield influences what cards you’ll want to include in your deck, and it is the combination of primary damage source and battlefield management strategies that defines the various archetypes you’re most likely to run across in Ashes. However, before we can get into that we need to break down “damage from attacking”, because there are several primary ways to deal attack damage.

## What’s your plan of attack?

There are several flavors of attack damage that you can use for your win con:

- **Swing around** (often referred to as “swinging wide”): if you have more unexhausted units than your opponent, they can’t block them all. Wide strategies typically focus on spamming out large numbers of low cost units, but can also be seen in smaller battlefields (as long as you have a consistent way to clog or clear your opponent’s units such that you shrink their effective battlefield value smaller than yours).
- **Swing through:** by leveraging units that can swing multiple times (either multiple times per round because they don’t exhaust, or due to refresh effects; or that survive more than one round), you can build up an incremental advantage over your opponent until they die by a thousand cuts or you are able to push through lethal damage in a chunk (often at the top of a round). A very common inclusion for swinging through strategies are cards that have Overkill like [Cerasaurus Mount](#) or [Power Through](#) (which deals direct damage when you kill an opponent’s unit; this sort of complementary damage accelerant is a great

example of how to supplement your main plan of attack).

- **Swing past:** who cares how many units your opponent has if none of them are allowed to block yours because you have an ability that disallows blocking? Most folks refer to this as “bypass”.
- **Stall:** sometimes you don’t want to swing at all! If your deck has a longer-term strategy, you may need units that can efficiently delay or destroy your opponent’s threats (often with a secondary benefit, like discarding cards from their deck on death). This isn’t a win con, per se, but it’s often a legitimate strategy for the first round or two as you try to draw into the cards your deck needs to stabilize. As a secondary strategy, it’s also an important way to shore up other attack strategies (e.g. decks that swing through or swing past often need to protect key units using Unit Guards or healing, both of which are stalling strategies).

People often like to refer to “swinging wide” vs. “swinging tall” (lots of small units vs. one really big unit), but I personally find those less useful categories because they don’t really capture how you plan to deal damage (e.g. a tall strategy could be a One Punch deck where you try to deal lethal damage in a single, unblockable chunk or it could be focused on swinging through medium sized chunks of damage consistently by killing off their battlefield; and which strategy you are using influences which other cards you are going to need much more than whether the deck is “tall,” “wide,” or somewhere in between).

## When do you want to win?

**Please note:** this topic is arguably related to higher-level deck-building, because it’s more about responding to potential threats in your meta rather than crafting a cohesive strategy for your own deck. However, even if you don’t worry about it when initially building a deck, you’ll probably want to have some familiarity with the topic when it comes time to revise your deck after playing it.

A final component to consider when evaluating archetypal strategies in Ashes is *when* your deck aims to win. This is a tricky topic, however, because it can shift depending on match-up, which means that it usually influences your secondary sources of damage rather than your primary win condition. This is something you consider during deck-building, but decide at the table.

Cards can either accelerate or decelerate the end game, depending on whether they increase or decrease a Phoenixborn’s effective life total. Generally speaking, you want to accelerate the end game for your opponent, and decelerate the end game for yourself (note: this means your Phoenixborn’s base life total is a consideration! E.g. a low life Phoenixborn might need to win quickly, or have support for decelerating their end game):

- **Accelerate:** there are two ways you can accelerate the end game: deal direct damage to your opponent’s Phoenixborn, or discard cards from their deck (either directly, or by doing something like spinning down their dice so they have to meditate). Fatigue damage is unavoidable, and if they are suffering fatigue damage it means their available resources are drastically constrained compared to a normal turn, both of which are good for you. A

lot of people ignore “mill” damage because they are playing a “swing” deck, but when swing decks stall out on battlefield fatigue damage can be a very effective closer.

- **Decelerate:** conversely, you can decelerate the game for yourself by healing your Phoenixborn or using dice fixing (to prevent needing to discard cards when meditating).

For instance, if you are trying to **swing through** and you come up against an opponent that is *also* swinging through, how will you ensure you come out ahead? Depending on what dice types you are running, you could **accelerate** their end game through **direct damage** or units that have abilities that discard from their deck, or **decelerate** the game for yourself by including healing or dice fixing.

One last thing that’s important to consider when thinking about when you want to win: accelerating and decelerating the end game are relative between you and your opponent and *not* necessarily tied to the overall length of the game! If you expect that you’ll need to deal with decks that **stall** you on battlefield and deal **direct damage**, for instance, you might want to include tools to **decelerate** your end game through healing to ensure that you survive long enough to push damage through on the battlefield (even though your deck otherwise tries to aggressively **swing past** lethal damage by the third or fourth round).

## What’s your (arche)type?

Ashes is an unusual game. The First Five rule, coupled with the ability to meditate spellboard cards, means that you can start with one strategy, then pivot into another or include multiple potential strategies for different expected opponents.

However, decks still do tend to fall into natural archetypes because if you generalize your deck too much you risk being unable to push damage through quickly enough.

Additionally, many of the best units in Ashes serve multiple purposes because they both serve as a threat (or defense) on the battlefield, and have an ability that affects the game in a different way (e.g. direct damage, discarding cards from deck to accelerate the end game and fatigue damage, etc.).

Historically, Ashes players have reused a lot of terminology from Magic: the Gathering. Here is how those terms map to the strategies above:

- **Swing:** swing decks typically **clear** their opponent’s battlefield by **refilling** or **replacing** attackers (and often by packing removal spells). They usually **swing around** or **swing through**, depending on the Phoenixborn (e.g. [Aradel](#) is more likely to swing around; [Odette](#) is more likely to swing through). The timing for winning with these decks varies a lot; a well-constructed swing deck vs. a deck without sufficient battlefield support can win as early as the top of the second round. When two well-matched swing decks face one another, though, the game can go quite long, with both players jockeying for position.

- **Bypass:** while it is possible to have a bypass swing deck (typically a deck that tries to **swing through** in conjunction with something like [Frostback Bear](#) that **swings past**), pure bypass decks tend to focus on creating a single huge threat that can't be blocked, and dealing all of their damage in a couple chunks. The quintessential example is [Silver Snakes](#) with [Hypnotize](#) (which **clears** and **stalls** until the Snake is large enough to **swing past**). These decks tend to try to close the game out within the third or fourth round, although depending on luck and matchup they can end things faster or grind on longer.
- **Burn:** pure burn decks are not really a thing in Ashes Reborn, to the best of my knowledge. Burn is typically used to **accelerate** and close out games regardless of archetype. Typically, burn decks attempt to **stall**, often with a mixture of **clog** and **clear** through defensive units and spells, then win by playing (and possibly recurring) **direct damage**.
- **Mill:** when most players mention "mill" what they mean are decks that **stall** and use a combination of **clear** and **clogging** to manage their opponent's attacking threats while simultaneously leaning heavily on effects that accelerate fatigue damage and the end game (this typically involves directly discarding cards from the opponent's deck, spinning down their dice so they are forced to meditate cards off their deck themselves, or both). It is also entirely possible to leverage "mill" cards within a deck that is focused on **swinging through**, though; in the aforementioned longer games between two well-balanced swing decks, fatigue damage is often a deciding factor so milling serves to **accelerate** the end game.
- **Control:** this isn't a distinct archetype in Ashes, per se; instead control cards are the ones that mess with your opponent's plan. Using the above terminology, spells that focus on **clearing**, **clogging**, or **stalling** are typically control cards. A control deck is one that usually tries to gain incremental advantages over an opponent to win the long game (and as such is often conflated with mill decks, although it's a perfectly valid strategy for decks that want to **swing through**, as well). Something that players sometimes miss is that the **recover** strategy is often a control strategy (because you have to manage your opponent's threats to ensure your threats are able to gain repeat value round-to-round).

One last distinction that can be useful when thinking about decks is whether they are **aggressive** or **defensive**. An aggressive deck will try to push as much damage through as fast as possible, whereas a defensive deck will try to accrue incremental advantages over a longer game. Sometimes having defensive tools in an otherwise aggressive deck (or vice versa) is an important method for managing different matchups (although knowing when that's necessary is something you'll gain through play experience).

## But what about the combos?!

You may have noticed that a particular archetype from other card games is not present above: the combo deck.

Never fear! Building around a specific combination of cards is a time-honored tradition in Ashes (even if many of these decks end up lovingly consigned to the “jank” category of fun concepts that don’t work consistently enough to be competitive). There are two types of combos in Ashes:

- **Explosive:** this is what people typically think of as “combos” when coming from other card games. It’s a specific combination of cards that offers sudden, high value with considerable setup. You will rarely see these in competitive Ashes because they are very easy to disrupt if your opponent knows what to expect (you typically have to play all the component pieces across several turns or else luck into the right cards in hand at the right time, giving your opponent lots of time to shut the combo down or making it difficult to execute the combo after the first turn).
- **Engine:** this is far and away the most common type of combo in Ashes, and is typically what you should try to build your deck around if you love combos. A value engine is a combination of cards that give repeated long-term value.

An example of an **explosive combo** is [Mind Fog Owl](#) (2 attack unit which can’t be blocked unless all other attacking units are blocked), [Shadow Hound](#) (3 attack, 1 life), [Accelerate](#) (grants 2 extra side actions), [Secret Door](#) (makes 1 life unit unblockable for a side action), and [Exhortation](#) (adds two unit’s attack values for a side action). This pushes through 10 unblockable damage, but is very easy to disrupt (your opponent could kill either unit before the combo went off, or make you discard a card from hand, or exhaust one of the two Ready Spells necessary to summon your units, etc.).

An example of a **combo engine** would be [Hunt Master](#) (which spends a status token to buff other units for the turn) and [Time Hopper](#) (which places a status token on another unit when it comes into play). This offers repeatable value that compounds the longer the game goes (and the longer the Hunt Master survives), which is much easier to set up and protect.

If you like building around a particular set of card interactions, you’ll want to ask yourself, “What strategies will allow this combo to help me win?” Combos, particularly **combo engines**, often require more time to stabilize and start to generate value so you might want to consider tools for **stalling** or **clogging** to shut down your opponent’s bigger threats. Alternatively, it can be very easy when building out an **explosive combo** to go overboard and end up with a deck that doesn’t do anything *except* execute the combo (which often means you are guaranteed to lose once your opponent knows what to expect). In that case you’ll want to be sure to include some cards that advance one of the win conditions outlined above, or else use the combo only against people who you believe aren’t expecting it, or are not building to prevent it.

## So how do you use these ideas?

Personally, I find these concepts most useful for evaluating how one of my own decks is likely to perform, because once I identify my primary strategy it becomes a lot easier to determine whether cards are supporting that strategy or not. It can also make comparing cards easier, because while I

might have two cards that support my primary win condition, if one of them *also* supports my secondary goals then that's probably the more valuable card for this deck.

For instance, if I'm building a [Maeoni](#) deck and I know I want to use [Grave Knight](#), then I already know that I am probably aiming to **swing through** my opponent's units (because that's one of the things that Grave Knight does best; it forces your opponent into blocking when they don't want to, and tosses some **direct damage** over the top). I also know that Grave Knight's relatively low health (for a knight) means that it will probably die every round. That means I'm going to need cards that **refill** my battlefield, and since I'm already trying to force my opponent into unfavorable trades I likely am looking at spells and units that aim to **clear** my opponent's stuff.

That jives fairly well with Maeoni, because her ability is a built-in clearing option and her small battlefield means that unless I'm very confident that I'll be able to push through lethal damage quickly, a **clogging** strategy on my part could badly misfire if my opponent's units have a chance to **recover**. I'll likely need some way to push through extra damage just in case my battlefield gets **stalled**, as well, so a bit of **direct damage** wouldn't be out of place (this also compliments Overkill on the Grave Knight, which is a source of direct damage that only functions if I am swinging through).

With those broad strokes out of the way, I have a basis for evaluating other cards to include, which can help lead to a more cohesive, functional deck.

Of course, just having cards that support a central strategy isn't enough, but it's often the first big step toward building a competitive deck. Once you have a central strategy, you can start evaluating cards based on their value compared to their cost, decide if you need to lean towards higher damage threats or spread the damage out, decide whether your utility spells should protect your units or threaten your opponent's units, etc.

If you have a particular meta deck that has been plaguing you, evaluating what strategy it is using can also help when coming up with a counter (e.g. they like to stall and clog? You could look into refreshing your battlefield and perhaps try a strategy that swings past).

## Narrow your options

Building decks in Ashes can be daunting, because there are so many possible cards you can include. By thinking about the core strategy behind your deck, you can narrow down the dice types and cards that will be most useful while simultaneously crafting a deck that is more focused and thus more likely to win. Having a feeling for the various strategies can also help evaluate your deck's strengths and weaknesses before bringing it to the table.

Ultimately, however, no amount of thinking about a deck can replace putting it to the test in an actual game. These strategies provide a starting point, but finding the right balance of cards for you requires seeing what works and what doesn't in an actual match. Particularly when it comes to choosing how many of each card to include or how heavily you need to lean into a particular

strategy, nothing beats hands-on experience. I highly recommend checking out the Ashes community online if you lack a regular local play partner (the Ashes community in general is absurdly welcoming, regardless of your skill level). You can find players on [Discord](#), or asynchronously through [Reddit](#), [BoardGameGeek](#), and Facebook.

Most importantly, though: have fun!

# Summary

This article ended up being a lot longer than I anticipated. **tl;dr:**

## Primary sources of damage

- **Attack damage** (most prevalent win condition)
  - **Swing around** (go wide around blockers)
  - **Swing through** (efficiently destroy blockers, then hit face)
  - **Swing past** (bypass blockers)
  - **Stall** (defend to buy time so you can set up other strategies)
- **Direct damage** (“burn”; typically a secondary source of damage)
- **Fatigue damage** (“mill”; typically a secondary source of damage)

## Battlefield management

Your battlefield:

- **Refill** (just keep pushing out expendable units from spellboard and/or recursion)
- **Refresh** (unexhaust or destroy own units to reuse battlefield slots)
- **Recover** (incremental gains from units that survive more than 1 round)

Your opponent’s battlefield:

- **Clear** (kill their stuff)
- **Clog** (exhaust their stuff)

## Shifting the end game

- **Accelerate** (deal damage to opponent, or discard cards from their deck)
- **Decelerate** (heal damage from yourself, or fix dice instead of meditating)

# Combos

- **Explosive** (sudden, high value; very easy to disrupt)
- **Engine** (ongoing, repeat value from a specific card interaction)



# Combat Mastery 2 - Tips to Improve Your Decision Making in Ashes Reborn.

By Timothy Cathcart

Ashes Reborn is fundamentally a game of combat and the battlefield. Many decks attempt to win by a mechanism other than the battlefield of course, spinning down dice with [Dream Fracture](#), or burning your opponent directly with [Chant of Revenge](#), but even then you still need to both plan and react to what's happening on the battlefield.

For this tip of combat mastery I will be focusing on a fundamental principle of summoning and trading units in combat and how to come up on top.

## Tip 2: Track Sources of Damage and Sequence Playing Units Accordingly

Your opponent is playing [Aradel Summergaard](#) and has not used their **Water Blast** ability yet. You have a [Hunt Master](#) in hand and want to apply some early aggressive pressure. But first you play [Summon Light Bringer](#) because it's good to have options, right? Now your opponent on their turn plays [Summon Gilder](#). Oh no!

This is a particularly straightforward example of how sequencing matters when it comes to sources of damage and sequencing your plays. Your opponent now has both **Water Blast** for 2 damage and **Summon Gilder** for 1 damage in one turn. No doubt they will be happy to kill your **Hunt Master** with this combo of damage if you play it now.



It's possible to predict that they would play the **Summon Gilder** since it's a common inclusion in **Aradel** decks. In this case you could have played the **Hunt Master** on turn 1. Then then they play **Summon Gilder**, threatening to take out the **Hunt Master** in one turn, you attack with the **Hunt Master** before they can kill it.

However this is just one example, it can be difficult to predict what your opponent is going to play and what sources of damage they have!

## Don't Play Into Their Source of Damage

Ok, so it happened anyway. Now they are setup to kill anything with 3 health. But they don't know you have a **Hunt Master** in hand! So simply don't play it yet, sequence playing other units first instead. Do you have a 1 health unit like **Summon Salamander Monk** or **Ritualist**? These give you extra value from their cost, even when they die, so having one killed by a **Gilder** isn't the end of the world. Can you play a 2 health unit on the cheap? **Old Salt** costs 2 dice so its a bad trade with the 1 dice **Water Blast** but at least you get to deal 1 damage as well from **Old Salt's** ability. A 2 health for 1 dice unit like **Jungle Forager** is hard to come by and your opponent might ignore them.

## Find Your Worst Case Scenario and Try To Avoid It

The pure efficiency of **Water Blast** is hard to escape from. 2 damage for 1 dice is probably going to trade well into one of your units which costs more. However, don't give your opponent the opportunity to pick the best unit to kill with their source of damage. Want to be able to play the [Hunt Master](#) without it dying? First summon your [Frostback Bear](#). It will be sad to see it die to the damage combo but then you can at least now play your [Hunt Master](#) more safely. And the reverse logic is true of here of course. Maybe you play the [Hunt Master](#) early, accepting the death blow from **Water Blast** and [Gilder](#) , since you've decided the [Frostback Bear](#) surviving is more important.

By trying to avoid your worst case scenario, you leave a lot of room for your opponent to misplay. Present your opponent with targets that aren't as bad for you to lose and hopefully they'll waste their damage. And if they hold off waiting for a better opportunity? Start putting on the pressure and making attacks with the units you already have and remember, passing is a legitimate option. If your opponent has 2 dice left at the end of the round, set aside for [Gilder](#) and **Waterblast** and you have 3 dice set aside for [Hunt Master](#) consider if the outcome of playing your unit is worth it or not. After the dust settles you'll end up with a [Panther Spirit](#) and your opponent will get a [Gilder](#). You may think that passing here is a good idea, forcing your opponent to either also pass or spend the **Water Blast** and **Gilder** on something else, thus enabling you to play the [Hunt Master](#). But be careful about side actions and passing! In this example your opponent will possibly **Water Blast** something and then also pass, preventing you from playing your unit before the round end. In any case try to assess the outcome of passing. When in doubt you may have to simply accept an unideal trade.

## Attacks Are Sources of Damage

Lets move away from this specific example and see how we can apply this theory to all sources of damage and sequence units accordingly.



When understanding your opponent's sources of damage its super important to consider what is available to them next turn. If your opponent has a [Battle Seer](#) in play then don't play your [Blood Archer](#), their attack and your life total is a match made in heaven! However remember that it unusually takes a whole turn to summon something before your opponent can attack with it. They have a [Summon Winged Lioness](#) book, waiting to be triggered? Feel free to summon your [Mirror Spirit](#) anyway. They might summon the [Winged Lioness](#) to take it out, but then you'll have a turn to attack first with the [Mirror Spirit](#) against whoever you want!

Attack with units that are about to become the negative side of an efficiency equation so that your opponent gets less value from taking them out. Avoid summoning units if you can see your opponent has an answer for them on the battlefield already.

On the flip side, you want to setup as a few different answers to take out your opponent's cards with efficient trades. If you only have sources of 1 damage in your hand and on the battlefield you'll struggle to deal with a large knight your opponent might play. Mix it up with different attack and damage values to give yourself options and put your opponent in a bind!

Of course, its inevitable that your opponent will get some efficient trades (unless you are absolutely crushing them on the battlefield). The key is to avoid the worst case scenarios and sequence your units to make that efficiency difficult for your opponent.

## Your Guard Is a Resource Not an Excuse To Badly Sequence



A mistake I used to make a lot is to play whatever units I felt like, knowing that I could just guard the first attack I didn't want to go through. However while this approach to using your guard can

work for playing an extremely aggressive deck that immediately giving up battlefield control, for most decks its a trap to use your guard so liberally in the round.

Each round is a series of attacks, some better for one player than another and you can only cancel one efficient trade with your guard. Just one! If your opponent has an [Ancestor Spirit](#) on the battlefield and you summon a 2 life unit like [Emberoot Lizard](#), sure you might be able to guard the inevitable attack the next turn from the [Spirit](#) against your [Lizard](#), but now you can't guard anything else, maybe an even better attack for your opponent later in the round! Instead, try to leave summoning the [Emberoot Lizard](#) and take out the [Ancestor Spirit](#) first with a different unit or source of damage.

## My Advice.

In summary my advice is to constantly assess your opponent's sources of damage when deciding how to sequence your unit plays. Try to predict what sources of direct damage they might have in hand and what attacks they have available on the battlefield. Avoid playing units with life totals that nicely match sources of damage your opponent currently has available. Attack with units you already have in play before they get taken out by an efficient source of damage.

Its an impossible task to perfectly sequence your units in a way that prevents any of them from getting taken out by your opponent's attacks and removal. However your should aim to sequence your unit plays to make it as difficult as possible for your opponent to get the most out of their damage sources.

# Combat Mastery 1 - Tips to Improve Your Decision Making in Ashes Reborn.

By Timothy Cathcart

Ashes Reborn is fundamentally a game of combat and the battlefield. Many decks attempt to win by a mechanism other than the battlefield of course, milling out an opponents deck with [Abundance](#), or burning your opponent directly with [Molten Gold](#), but even then you still need to both plan and react to what's happening on the battlefield.

This “battlefield matters” aspect of the game is often what attracts players to the game.

Depending on your deck’s victory condition it can be a great idea to play cards like [Kneel](#) and [Nature’s Wrath](#) to reduce the complexity of the board state and remove opportunities your opponent has to outplay you on the battlefield. However, even with those cards in your arsenal making good choices in how you play out combat is still usually critical to success.

Some basic advice for getting better at Ashes is quite easy to understand. Ensure you can spend all ten dice in your round one first five! Make sure your deck has a victory condition and perhaps even a plan B in different match-ups!

However getting better at the very fundamentals of ashes combat sequencing can be quite hard to nail down. When should you guard an attack? What unit should attack which enemy? When should you go all out and attack with everyone? These are questions that really depend on the state of the game.

In these articles I’ll try to give some concrete advice that will hopefully help you answer those questions as they show up in your games.

## Tip 1: Identify Your Current Defensive and Aggressive Battlefield Priority.

Your opponent plays **Wallop** on their **Frostback Bear** and attacks your **Hammer Knight**. Should you guard the attack?





The answer is usually yes, but to understand the basics of why this is (and whenever this is not the case) you need to consider your current aggressive and defensive battlefield priority.

The aim of the game is to ultimately deal damage to your opponent's PB, but how direct that goal relates to your decision making depends on the state of the game. If guarding an attack would kill your PB, obviously you can't do it. What about leaving you 2 away from death, easily within [Final Cry](#) range?

**Battlefield Dominance.** This is often your default battlefield priority. The goal here is to destroy your opponents units without losing as many as yours. This will enable you to later on favourably convert your battlefield control into damage to the enemy's PB. If you can dominate the battlefield you also prevent your opponent from executing a large plan of attack. Having powerful exhausted units that refresh at the start of the round when your opponent has none to match is often a good sign of who's winning a game of Ashes.



### Battlefield Dominance Attack

To play this priority aggressively, you should always make attacks against your opponents units, never their PB. Try to match your attack and costs against enemy units as efficiently as possible.

Kill their 2 cost [Winged Lioness](#) with your 1 cost [Seafoam Snapper](#) and you just gained a 1 dice battlefield advantage.



### Battlefield Dominance Defence

Defensively you should guard the largest swing in attack and efficiency as possible. Your opponent just attacked with a 4 attack [Frostback Bear](#) against your [Hammer Knight](#)? Guard that attack and you just took a massive amount of damage out of the equation of battlefield dominance. Even if the damage you take is high and you'd rather have avoided the efficient opportunity for your

opponent in the first place (the subject of the next combat tip) it still might be the right play.

On this flip side, if battlefield dominance is your aggressive priority you want to make it as awkward as possible when your opponent chooses to guard. Don't over commit with a large attack against a low health unit. Your opponent may surprise you and guard the attack anyway.

**PB Damage.** Take everything you've learned about battlefield dominance and flip it on its head.



### **PB Damage Attack**

Aggressively prioritizing PB damage means calculating a good time to strike wide. If you outnumber your opponent's unexhausted units, you can guarantee at least one of your attackers will make it through. Your deck may require more turns of setup but beware taking too long before swinging with everyone. You can use one PB guard to essentially exhaust a unit when they attack (forcing them to do this with [Light Bringer](#) is a classic aggressive move), but after that your opponent can start forcing your units into a dominance battle.

Knowing that your opponent will want to guard to protect a unit is also a very important way to deal PB damage from the battlefield. Try attacking units with just a little more attack than is necessary and they may mistakenly guard the attack, falling into your aggressive plans.



### **PB Damage Defence**

Defensively you should avoid guarding at all or guard only a small damage attack and start playing reactively to protect your PB's life total. Your opponent may be caught off guard when you accept the death of an important unit but it might be worth it in the end. Attacking is risky since you'll no longer have them as blockers. First build up a defence of couple unexhausted units so that you can make key attacks without worrying about massive counter swings against your PB.

## **My Advice.**

My first piece of advice is to go big on your battlefield priority and make extreme plays with your guarding. If you are prioritizing dominance don't be afraid to guard large attacks, they may win you battlefield control. If you are prioritizing PB health it can seem terrible to let your units die and not use your guard all round, or use it on a seemingly less important but less PB damaging attack, but that life total difference might be what wins you the game.

So when should you be prioritizing which battlefield goal?

Most "normal" battlefield based decks start with prioritizing battlefield dominance in round one before transitioning to defensive PB survival if their own life points get low, and transitioning to



aggressive PB survival if their opponent's life points get low.

It's important to recognise that you can have a different aggressive and defensive battlefield priorities at the same time.

If your opponent's life points drop to a low value before yours do, consider using your own health liberally to guard large attacks before pushing for the victory by aggressively swinging wide.

Some players are playing for domination almost the entire game, only attacking the PB directly when there is nothing left of their opponent's to destroy. If you are trying to improve your standard battlefield game of Ashes, this is an excellent choice to focus on.

However, consider the following possibilities as well:

- If you are playing against a dedicated burn deck you may want to immediately prioritize protecting your PB health.
- If you are playing lots of aggressive units, you may wish to prioritize dealing PB health immediately, and even more aggressively, pair it with defensive dominance, sacrificing your own health to protect your units.
- If your opponent isn't playing a burn plan but has access to burn cards, switch earlier from dominance to protecting your health to avoid losing while in control.
- If you're on a slow mill plan, prioritize protecting your own PB health but try to play for battlefield dominance aggressively.
- If you are on burn plan, you want to protect your PB health but prioritize dealing your enemy PB damage at the same time.

These points of advice are up for debate and will change depending on your personal evaluation of the meta and the decks in the game. The potential for battlefield clog can also offer a unique twist to games, but I haven't covered that here.

## **Consider Your Priorities!**

In summary my first tip for improving your combat skills for Ashes Reborn is as follows: Each round/turn ask yourself the question "Which is my aggressive priority here, PB health or battlefield dominance?" Then also ask yourself the question, "Which is defensive priority here?"

# Every Single Phoenixborn - Ninja's Tier List and Guide

Recently I've completed my ten wins on Ashteki with every phoenixborn in the game. I thought I'd share my thoughts on each one, how powerful I think it is, strengths and common combos.

## A Tier

### Hope



**How to Win:** **Duplicate** is unbelievable value. You should definitely be using it every round to apply pressure with key 1 life conjurations especially those that have 2 or more attack. Combo this aggression with **Void Pulse** to take out enemies and either hit face or control the battlefield.

**Deck Styles:** You generally want to max out **Void Pulse** damage so swarming and playing lots of cheap units is a good plan. Taking out a 3 or 4 health unit can be amazing value, but don't get too greedy and wiped by card like **Nature's Wrath**. Start your deckbuilding by choosing what 1 life conjurations you can duplicate. You can utilize your giant spell board to insure you still have

multiple different 1 life units you could duplicate, should your opponent take one of them out. **Duplicate** and **Void Pulse** together do make for a pretty aggressive package, so an aggressive attacking deck strategy will work well here.

**Common Combos:** What makes Hope so powerful and my number 1 PB is the flexibility they provide with **Duplicate**. Common targets for the ability are **Shadow Hound**, **Vampire Bat Swarm** and **Light Bringer**. **Shadow Hound** is the most expensive conjuration with 1 life so it makes sense you get a lot of value from duplicating it. **Vampire Bat** has a great on destruction ability you can trigger and **Light Bringer** can really help with your aggressive strategy, forcing your opponent to attack when it's least beneficial and then hitting back hard when they exhaust their units.

### **Proven Competitive Lists:**

Carl's LKA V Winning Shadow Hounds deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/50100/>

Killercactus's Collection 2023 Top 4 Aggro Burn deck:

<https://ashes.live/decks/share/8534a00b-f6ff-487d-acbd-90cbf4742ab6/>

Brian B's Pod II Top 2 Shadow Hounds PACT deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/975e32d4-cea7-4b2e-b2d8-ef7f540078ec/>

**My Best Homebrew:** <https://ashes.live/decks/44410/>

Helping me get my 10 wins with Hope is this **Shadow Hound** deck which combines the time dice **Fighting Spirit** spellboard package with classic Hope **Shadow Hounds**.

With so many 1 life units to choose from I have a lot of options during the game. Every card I draw helps me build up my spellboard with focus effects, so quite often I duplicate the **Wishing Wing** instead of the **Shadow Hound**, depending on if there is a juicy target to stalk and kill. Build up your **Fighting Spirit** with tokens and hit your opponent with a big attack, using some combination of **Void Pulse**, **Accelerate**, and **Stand Still** to ensure your opponent cannot block the beatdown. Just be careful to avoid getting clogged, always leave a battlefield slot open for a **Seafoam Snapper** to eat something or a conjuration to duplicate into!

## **Harold**



**How to win:** Harold is the master of controlling the battlefield, and outvaluing your opponent in combat. **Hunter's Mark** is versatile and can be used in several different ways to ensure victory. First you can use it against high life enemy units to trade efficiently. Put the **Hunter's Mark** on an opponent's 4 life knight unit and attack with literally any 2 attack unit to take them out. There's usually nothing the opponent can do as every round **Hunter's Mark** allows you to go up at least 1 dice in combat every round.

Another combination is to use direct damage to take out the enemy with the mark. Any main action direct damage in particular can be used with **Hunter's Mark** on the same turn to take out a 2 health unit.

Trying to taking out a large enemy unit with a big attack usually means the opponent guards with their PB, using their life as a resource. **Hunter's Mark** can be used to deny that play so try putting large attack units and combos into your Harold deck, knowing that you can use the large attacks without fear of PB guarding.

**Deck Styles:** Harold is amazing at dominating and "winning" the battlefield, so your focus should be on what to do with that control. Stack your deck full of knights or burn cards, just remember you have to actually win at some point by attacking your opponent's PB once you have control of the battlefield.

**Common Combos:** There are many cards which combo with **Hunter's Mark**. **Old Salt** is already a great value proposition of a body and a ping damage made even better when combined with **Hunter's Mark**. **River Skald** can seem like overkill but allows you to discard 2 cost cards for 4 damage or take out something with annoying **Root Armor**. Use **Hunter's Mark** and knights with combat kill effects like **Sonic Swordsman** to ensure those effects get triggered.

## Proven Competitive Lists:

Carl's Collection 2023 Winning PACT deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/3a12679a-bfab-4847-a9ec-cbdc58bcdbf0/>

Killercactus's Pod I Top 2 PACT deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/236d8dd9-44b7-4875-9be9-4224cc3c75e4/>

Brian B's Collection 2023 Top 2 PACT deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/6600553b-6cc7-4a2d-870d-e27d31f4103a/>

The Treatment's Pod II Top 4 Spindown deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/763330d1-ff15-4889-aa8e-d8fd49fac398/>

My Best Homebrew: <https://ashes.live/decks/43621/>

Helping me get my 10 wins with Harold is this knight heavy battlefield control deck. The key card of the deck is **Glory Aspirant** which can be used to pull out **Light Swordsman**, **Silver Paladin** or **Sonic Swordsman**. In round 1 the deck usually plays double **Sonic Swordsman**, by pulling the second copy from the deck with the **Glory Aspirant**. **Sonic Swordsman** is a nasty combination with Harold's **Hunter's Mark** ability. Your opponent may have some way to play around it but once you play the second copy of **Sonic Swordsman** and combo it with **Pride** late in the round your opponent should be in real trouble. Ideally your 3 dice cost knights heal damage and survive for round 2 and the game snowballs into your control. There are a lot of powerful options in the deck as well, **Light Swordsman** can pressure a Phoenixborn guard by attacking something with 2 life. **River Skald** can pitch one of your many costly cards like **Silver Paladin** for massive damage and then **Shepard of the Lost Souls** can bring it back, or vice versa. **Chant of Transfusion** and **Old Salt** is as good here as any deck, moving the damage with a side action from **Old Salt** to take out enemies and heal in one go. Finally I like playing **Mirror Spirit** as a possible threat, not necessary summoned every round, but if the battlefield clogs up enough via **Sonic Swordsman** exhausts, it suddenly becomes worth it to summon.

## Rin





**How to win:** Winning with Rin is all about using his **Ice Buff** ability on the unit which benefits the most from it. Changing a 2 life unit to a 3 life unit can have the largest impact since placing your unit outside of double ping removal range can make a big difference. An already tough unit to take out with 3 or more health like a knight becoming even more difficult to kill can also work well.

In general **Shattering Fist** is a much more powerful removal card than the more situational and expensive **Rin's Fury** which can admittedly catch an opponent off guard attacking with a knight, since it's rarely played. Note the side action cost for this event and get your **Ice Buff** or other disposable alteration out early so that you have the option to shatter an enemy whenever is best. A good move to exploit this side action destruction can be attacking a 4 life knight unit with a 1 attack ally. If your opponent doesn't guard the single damage then the extra 3 from shattering fist is enough to destroy their 3 dice investment and make them regret their decision.

**Deck Styles:** With superior unit health and a powerful removal spell Rin is best suited for controlling the battlefield to his advantage and converting that control to PB damage later. I find **Ice Buff** is generally more powerful when combined with higher health units, so focusing on making kills without losing your units in the attack can give your opponent very awkward combat math to deal with. However there are also some 1 life units with powerful effects that usually don't get triggered since they die so quickly, you might want to consider building around buffing them instead.

**Common Combos:** The main reason Rin is in my A tier of PBs is how **Shattering Fist** combines with **Adaptodon** for amazing round 1 value. The downside of **Shattering Fist** removing an alternation turns into a positive since you can trigger **Adaptodon's Adapt** ability again, and conjure another **Adaption** alteration. Altogether this can combine for 5 direct damage and a 2/2 unit just for 3 dice, split up however is most useful.

Other common combos are units that benefit from the extra 1 life. **Frostback Bear** is already a great value proposition that can get even harder to remove with 4 life instead of 3. **Ruin Dweller** is an example of a 2 dice summon that is often the target of removal, so getting it up to 3 health is great protection against direct damage. **Shadow Spirit** often doesn't get to even trigger its spindown effect before dying to 1 direct damage so 2 health might just be enough to see it actually attack. It's worth mentioning **Ice Golem** as an obvious choice for the **Ice Buff** to trigger the additional life from **Skin Morph**, but even so the investment of 3 dice into a large unit can be underpowered, so I don't recommend this unit unless you're fine with playing something janky.

### Proven Competitive Lists:

Fred's LKA II Winning Adaptodon Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/49763/>

Chaos Theory's GenCon 2023 Winning Frostback Bear Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/38694/>

Carl Diaz's LKA VII Top 4 Battlefield Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/467f6072-73e8-4f9d-a7ab-c36584974d77/>

MBauer's LKA I Top 4 Spindown Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/48695/>

MBauer's LKA IV Top 4 Spindown Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/662608d1-a5c2-4511-8986-68c2ca458e41/>

Ninja's LKA II Top 4 Adaptodon Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/48880/>

**My Best Homebrew:** <https://ashes.live/decks/48880/>

Helping me get my 10 wins with Rin and Top 4 at LKA2 is this extremely fun to play big beastly deck of large units and alterations.

Use the now classic Rin combo of **Adaptodon** and **Shattering Fist** to blast your opponents units in round 1. Then tactically decide which of your four summons best suits the **Ice Buff** in any given round. With 8 dice every round spent on summons the rest of the deck is full of situational actions and alterations. Pump value into your 2 dice beasts by giving them just the right amount of attack, or extra ping to dominate the battlefield. Don't worry too much about losing your large units, just make your opponent waste energy and attacks to take them out!

## Maeoni



**How to win:** There are two main flavours of Maeoni, split between classic combo builds for exploiting the best conjuration in the game **Silver Snake** with the goal of turning it into a game winning attacker, and less tried and tested alternative strategies with **Venom Strike** or some other exploitation of Maeoni's **Command Strike** ability.

With **Silver Snake** employed on the battlefield you can make your goal a multi stage plan: protect, grow and then finally strike. Use allies with Unit Guard to protect your snake from getting killed early while it has no attack. Then use direct damage and removal, or even something like stalk attacks, to take out enemy units and stack those status tokens high on your snake buddy. Finally when they are big enough, the snake can attack with a fearsome total.

**Command Strike** can be used in combination with the **Silver Snake** as well. Once you have enough tokens your snake's attack value will kill whatever you desire and fuel the growth of your serpentine monster even more. Just be careful of **Fate Reflection**!

**Deck Styles:** With the classic Maeoni combo deck you can grow your snake to a massive attack value and then use bypass tools to hit your opponent's PB life total. Most games of ashes reborn are a back and forth of PB guards and incremental damage, but with a big enough snake 2 or even 1 attack can be enough to clinch victory.

Alternatively you can focus less on comboing the destructive power of the snake and build a more well rounded battlefield deck. With only a couple enemy deaths the **Silver Snake** is an amazing value proposition on its own with 4 life for only 2 dice. Your opponent may overspend resources removing the snake threat before they realize you have backup options for victory.



Instead of waiting for your snake to grow, **Command Strike** can also be used in conjunction with units that already have high attack, so consider adding a 3 dice knight ally to your first five for example.

Finally you can go in a completely different direction and focus on the less traditionally powerful **Venom Strike** unique action card, spamming out Charm Dice across your opponent's battlefield before burning and milling them. Spam those Charm Dice as early as possible in the round and avoid actually killing their units with a more passive game plan.

**Common Combos:** Despite being number 4 in my PB power rankings, Maeoni isn't my favourite PB, in part because I find the tried and tested cards that work so well with her **Silver Snake** don't leave as much room for the creative deckbuilding Ashes is known for. **Gilder** is an amazing conjuration for both protecting the **Silver Snake** with unit guard, slamming direct damage into enemies and even more status tokens for the snake when the Gilder dies. **Explosive Growth** is also almost a must in any snake deck, the multiplication factor can provide your snake with insane amounts of attack. Finally **Hypnotize** is usually the go to bypass combo card to guarantee your massive attack is the game winning move.

### **Proven Competitive Lists:**

Kaile's SB5 Winning Bypass Combo Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/de331ca9-2626-4615-82d3-4ec1c7558776/>

Carl's SB3 Winning Bypass Combo Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/751e31fd-1c5b-4b01-8a2e-f96d241dd709>

**My Best Homebrew:** <https://ashes.live/decks/53294/>

Helping me get 10 wins with Maeoni is this divine heavy take on the classic snake deck. It's got the usual suspects of **Summon Gilder**, **Explosive Growth**, and **Hypnotise** to feed the **Silver Snake**, power it up and then bypass for victory.

Additionally **Royal Charm** is a nasty combination with **Silver Paladin** which can be recurred with **Glory Aspirant** and **Shepard of Lost Souls**. After killing something to feed the snake with the **Silver Paladin**, 4 attack is perfect to combine with **Command Strike**.

This deck is quite tricky to play, keep an eye on your dice and avoid running out of cards in the round by spending incorrectly. The key to success here is to try and predict your opponent based on their dice spread. If they are running 2+ divine dice themselves be wary of your opponent playing their own **Silver Paladin** to eat your snake. You can get away with summoning your **Silver Snake** later in the round. If your opponent has an illusion or time dice power side be wary of a **Fate Reflection** and keep back your command strike combo in reserve or spend your dice elsewhere. Finally, don't forget to use your royal charm dice before the end of the round, don't pass early without putting it on an enemy unit, or you'll be stuck with only 9 dice to spend next round.

# Odette



**How to win:** That sword isn't just for show! Odette brings consistent destruction down upon the enemy. **Enter the Fray** is the bane of every 0 attack 2 life unit out there, and can also be used aggressively against anything that needs taking out asap regardless of damage to PB. It doesn't get more removal than simply destroy an unit than **Sword of Virtue**, the ultimate send off for any high health enemy.

My advice, if you suspect a 0 attack unit will get played, like the **Raptor Hatchling** or **Ruby Cobra** then hold off on your **Enter the Fray**, but don't be afraid to use your PB health as a resource and take out that 2 life **Winged Lioness** or pesky **Adaptodon**. Between PB guarding, **Enter the Fray** and destroying a unit with **Sword of Virtue** you should be able to establish control of the battlefield quickly, just make sure you have a plan to convert that battlefield control into big PB damage in later rounds before all that **Enter the Fray** damage adds up.

**Sword of Virtue** is 2 dice for removal, so if your opponent plays a 3 dice knight round 1 its a fantastic trade for you. However what if they play all cheap units round 1? By also playing a large unit yourself you can make the most of the sword's flexibility, take out their knight, or refresh your own.

**Armor of Valor** is great value over the course of the game, so you may wish you consider play it over **Sword of Virtue**, especially in round 1 where it will get the most value over the course of the game. Now your PB life total wont take quite the same hit from enter the fray so you can use it even more liberally than usual. Just don't overplay the **Armor of Valor**, if your opponent summons a 0/2 like **Ruby Cobra** it might still be the right play to **Enter the Fray** on them, wasting their 1 dice summon for free. Playing the **Armor of Valor** will potentially slow down your game plan a

little compared to round 1 **Sword of Virtue**, so consider having a plan B strategy for victory in case your opponent plays very passively, walling up with defencing units and refusing to attack you.

**Deck Styles:** With the ability to take out key enemy units round after round Odette is the perfect home for combo decks that require protecting specific special units. Combo **Enter the Fray** with side action damage and you can take out most threats before they can attack. By sacrificing your PB health you can establish control of the battlefield, so even if you don't play big unit combo consider running high attacks units that can convert that battlefield control into enemy PB damage.

**Common Combos:** Bypass decks are a common combo with Odette, starting with the cornerstone bypass card **Frostback Bear**. Take out their units with attack high enough to block your fearsome ursine friend, and leave the rest to scramble as you hit their PB. Unit Gaurd summons can make things even more awkward to navigate for your opponent, like **Turtle Guard** or **Butterfly Monk**. With only 3 spell board slots you have to make those summons count!

Then there is the question of what units will benefit most from protection and **Sword of Virtue** refreshing. **Realm Walker** is always a frustrating threat for your opponent if you can keep it alive long enough. **Massive Growth** or **Wallop** can turn your **Frostback Bear** or other attacker into a unit worthy of attacking multiple times.

There is a possible specific combo with Odette and **Shining Hydra** you may wish to consider. Use **Enter the Fray** on the Hydra while it has 1 attack, then give it **Massive Growth** while you use **Regenerate Heads** to heal the damage. With just a 2 card combo your **Shining Hydra** will end up as a 7 attack **Terrifying 2** unit, quite possibly enough to win the game with multiple attacks against your opponent's PB health.

### Proven Competitive Lists:

Brian B's LKA VIII Winning Silver Paladin Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/21181aa6-f6e1-455e-b9cd-4e870404fe5f/>

Mbauers' LKA VIII Top 4 Spindown Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/3b0d553e-fd22-4e55-a4d7-4241ffbd89c/>

Clu's SB LCQ Winning Realmwalker Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/dfda61e5-a82a-4dd2-9f91-1506b3b97775/>

Shadowfire's Phoenix Pod I Top 4 Battlefield Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/32f91b2c-1ec6-42f4-b304-4a703ac1279d/>

**My Best Homebrew:** <https://ashes.live/decks/37819/>

Helping me get 10 wins with Odette and first place at the Sunhold Webcam Tournament is my personal variation of the bypass deck, with **Steadfast Guardian**. **Root Armor** on the Guardian

can make it very difficult to deal with, and if they deal incremental damage **Sword of Virtual** refresh can be devastating.

Use the classic combo of **Shining Hydra**, **Enter the Fray** and **Massive Growth** to close out the game. To add consistency to the deck, **Polarity Mage** can pull either **Root Armor** or **Massive Growth** from the discard. Use **Light Bringer** to make your opponent attack awkwardly into the armoured **Steadfast Guardian**. You can even play **Call To Action** in response to get another attack out of your bypass Bear or Hyrda. A fun unexpected trick unique to this version of the deck is to play the **Massive Growth** onto the **Steadfast Guardian** if you need to. This can really put your opponent in a bind.

Finally, when it comes to closing out the game don't forget those charm dice! Using a charm dice power to reduce an enemy unit's attack below the terrifying threshold of my bear has won me several games!

## Astrea



**How to win:** The combination of Astrea's consistent and removal-like **Beguile** and the ultimate destructive power of **Judgment** makes her my top rated slow control style PB. Use **Beguile** on anything that looks like key threat, a 3 dice knight ally perhaps, or an important expensive conjuration. Even if you don't actually use **Beguile**, the threat of it can prevent your opponent from overcommitting on a single unit. Nothing entirely wipes the board quite like **Judgment** does, so play slowly, and punish your opponent from overcommitting on controlling battlefield.

**Mark of the Goddess** can also be a nasty surprise, even if its hard to justify giving up even 1 of your **Judgments**. What seems at first like a downside of the card, burning your opponent instead

of destroying a unit, can be amazing value for 1 dice if your opponent is foolish enough to leave a high attack unit as their only unexhausted unit.

**Deck Styles:** Unlike previous PBs so far in this tier list the key to success for Astrea lies beyond the battlefield, using her control tools to prevent your opponent from gaining a large advantage while you burn, mill, or combo your opponent to death. Astrea can give you a lot of time between board wipes and slowing down your opponent with **Beguile**, you just have to make the best use of that time to seize victory.

**Common Combos:** With a small battlefield her as main weakness make sure to pack ping or AOE cards like **Nature's Wrath**. It might seem like overkill with **Judgement** in your back pocket but you'll want to wait for a better moment to play the almighty obliteration than when your opponent simply plays a **Raptor Herder**.

**To Shadows** can combo in the same turn with **Beguile** for a 2 dice removal of any unit. **Chant of Revenge** and **Frostbite** can provide a slow burn engine to work with Astrea's slow game plan, **Abundance** or other ready spell mill cards can work well with a slow mill plan. **Orchid Dove** works well with a **Judgment** wipe as well as being a mill staple, and **Shimmer Wing** can give you the card draw you need for the big wipe.

Using **Strengthen** but on your opponent's unit for a big **Mark of the Goddess** hit is a great fun combo, though **Strengthen** itself is generally a large dice investment so you'll want to maximize the value it provides even when you don't have **Mark of the Goddess**.

### **Proven Competitive Lists:**

Ninja's LKA I Winning Burn Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/53108/>

**My Best Homebrew:** <https://ashes.live/decks/53108/>

Helping me get 10 wins with Astrea, first place at LKA I tournament and top 4 at LKA V is this slow burn control deck.

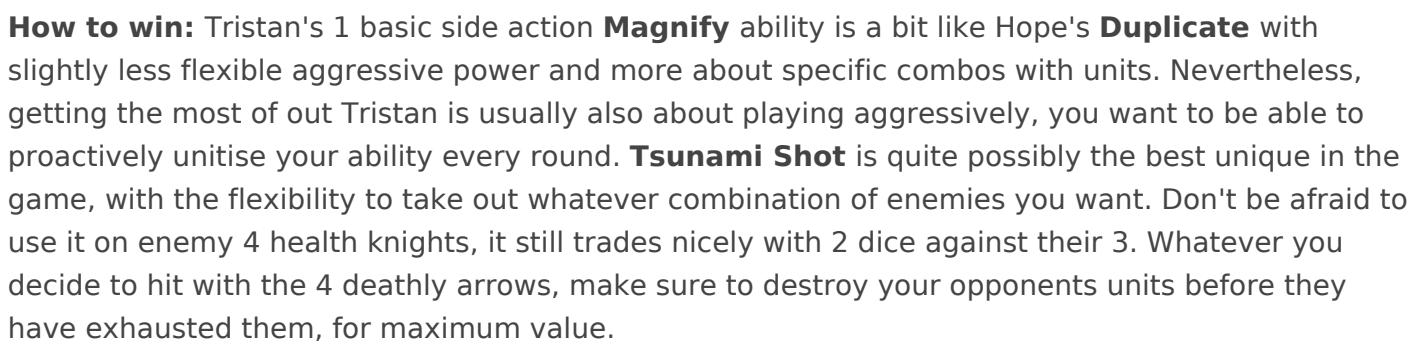
Use **Ritualist** in round 1 to setup the **Chant of Revenge** burn engine. Every card in this deck is extremely important, either burn or something to discard for **Judgment**, so don't be disappointed when you never get to trigger **Ritual Flames** on your **Shimmer Wing**, its just there for the card draw!

Between **Frostbite** in later rounds, recurring **Fire Archer** with a ceremonial dice power and **Chant of Revenge**, you should be able to close out any game that lasts long enough, the trick is not to lose the battlefield too badly while you drip feed damage.

Use **Judgment** at a crucial moment just after your opponent has control of the battlefield! If you've still got blockers and **Beguile** you can hold out for as long as possible for resetting your opponent's progress.



# Tristan



**Common Combos:** For an instant swarm of fish, **Prism Tetra** is a classic staple of Tristan decks. With magnify on all 3 of them, the 6 attack for 3 dice can be an efficient attack, just keep in mind this locks you into a super aggressive strategy since the fish don't stick around from round to round. **Ruby Cobra** can supplement or form the backbone of a Tristan deck. The extra attack and

mill combine for something fairly high value, especially if you boost it situationally to attack into 2 health units, or combo the **Magnify** with a second, 1 health unit. **Vampire Bat Swarm** and **Raptor Herder** are common options for simply boosting the attack or your wide swings. **Frost Frog** can be an interesting option to magnify and exhaust a troublesome blocker impeding your aggro progress. **Frostback Bear** offers something completely different from the other attack boosting options, powerful bypass, since your opponent is far less likely to have a 3 attack unit than a 2 (especially if you focus on killing them!).

### Proven Competitive Lists:

Brian's LKA III Winning Aggro 0 Attack Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/4a01dae3-5bed-4458-ac0b-7097b940231a/>

Carl's LKA IV Winning Aggro Burn Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/96baba07-63a1-48bb-97f1-c8772eee9210/>

My Best Homebrew: <https://ashes.live/decks/53361/>

Helping me get my 10 wins with Tristan is this pretty straightforward and extremely aggressive deck. **Magnify** the **Prism Tetra** and throw in a **Vampire Bat Swarm** if needed to hit your opponent hard and fast. Play **Sleeping Widows** when they board wipe you for even more attackers. **Guilt Link** is perfect for trading your exhausted fish for their... not useless unit. The burn in the rest of the deck can close out the game while you never stop applying pressure with attacks.

The key here is not to wait for a perfect swarm attack opportunity. The moment you can trigger any of your group tactics you should swing, otherwise a single **Nature's Wrath** can set you back significantly. Keep the **Tsunami Shot** for anything that smells like a unit with alert, like a 4 health 3 dice knight, which may otherwise be a problem for our go wide plan.

## Dimona



**How to win:** Dimona has a lot of moving parts and working out how to sequence your attacks and mounts can be tricky. Promoting an exhausted ally into the **Empyrean Mount** is a pretty sweet deal, but you need to get an exhausted ally that doesn't die to damage or a combat trade. Allies with exhaust abilities, or quickstrike can help you out here. Understanding the strange details of the combat phase can help you get the most out of your **Empyrean Mount**. Since it forces a unit to block instead of using stalk to prevent guarding it can be used in combination with other units attacking. It's also rather unusually for a summon has recover 3 which means trading into something smaller and leaving it wounded can force your opponent into really awkward plays to either get rid of it or allow it to heal up.

**Divinity Mount** is a pretty crazy card and can win you games with aggression and damage. The side action summoning is key to taking out your opponent's board at the most inopportune time. By playing **Take to the Skies** and then immediately attacking, you can quite often take out an unexhausted 1 life unit on your opponent's board. You really want to hit your opponent's life total with the **Divinity Mount** and avoid trading. To do this you can sequence the dragon to attack at the end of the round, combo it with the **Empyrean Mount** which will deal with 1 blocker, and prioritize killing anything with more than one 1 life before the dragon arrives.

On the other hand, **Rayward Knight** is not a particularly strong card, though it does have some limited uses. For a knight, 3 attack and 3 life isn't a great statline without a super powerful ability. Recurring allies from the discard into your deck can be useful to combat a a very particular problem, running out of allies, and the 3 basic cost can help avoid meditations against fatigue decks as well, so it can be a worthy include for **Fallen** decks which may have a problem running out of allies.



**Deck Styles:** Dimona's options are pretty aggressive, and her decks tend to follow. You want to play quite a hefty number of allies to guarantee the **Empyrean Mount** has a target that hasn't been removed by your opponent. **Divinity Mount** is extremely powerful, but it can also lock you into a very specific play pattern of all out aggression, trying to take out enemy 2+ lifers and hitting your opponent's life total hard. Quick tip here, in a pinch you can even exhaust Dimona without a valid target to set it up for the **Divinity Mount** the next turn. It's obviously unideal since you don't get a **Empyrean Mount**, but with a committed dragon strategy and no available allies to mount it might be the right play in some circumstances.

Alternatively, a more control style of play is possible with Dimona. **Empyrean Mount** can provide a lot of value if it trades into the right units, and forcing the block with **Battlemaster** can deny your opponent the PB guard that usually gives them a leg up on the battlefield.

**Common Combos:** Combining **Dimona** with **Summon Fallen** creates an entire deck archetype. The theory here is that Dimona forces your opponent to choose between two problems, either take out your units and fuel the **Fallen** engine or allow them to quickly trigger the **Empyrean Mount** and **Divinity Mount** chain. If your opponent miscalculates may end up with both anyway!

When it comes to mount targets for the **Empyrean Mount**, there are a few common options worth considering. The ally needs to be exhausted which changes things a little from the usually unexhausted mount. **Light Swordsman** can become exhausted without dying by attacking something with **Quick Strike**. **Raptor Herder** or **Ptera Herder** can go wide enough with swings to avoid dying when they attack, something **Light Bringer** can also help you with. **Rose Fire Dancer** is an interesting pick for a more control style deck. Consider spamming enough 1 cost units in general as a potential solution.

Once you have the **Empyrean Mount** or **Divinity Mount** you may wish to get more value out of it. Unexhaust cards like **Call to Action** or **Adrenaline Rush** can give you a powerful double swing, especially with the dragon, and since they are conjurations, **Resummon** also works.

### **Proven Competitive Lists:**

Ebfritz's LKA VII Winning Dragon Aggro Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/93d5e825-291d-4ee7-af8a-2dd3536dc73f/>

Nosuchmethod's Phoenix Pod II Winning Fallen Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/9fc800f1-92ff-4947-8cca-fc7b44a762bb/>

**My Best Homebrew:** <https://ashes.live/decks/57775/>

Helping me get my 10 wins with Dimona is this go wide version of Dragon Aggro. The aim here is to spam **Raptor Herder** as much as possible, a classic archetype of itself. Then, after swinging wide with all your units, play down the surprise summon **Mirror Spirit** who should come out pretty large. Throw in another classic, the **Chant of Transfusion** and **Old Salt** combo and you should be able to get a lot of removal value in later rounds. Hopefully with enough allies getting played and replayed with **Shepard of Lost Souls** you should be able to summon the **Empyrean Mount** and

then drop the **Divinity Mount** at the last minute of the round. Get your opponent's life total low enough and you can finish them off with **Final Cry** and **Sympathy Pain**. Regardless, keep the aggression up and keep constantly attacking, hopefully this deck can get it done.

## B Tier

### Coal



**How to win:** Starting out my B tier is the often times tricky to play yet high damage ceiling master of the ping damage. **Slash** is an oddity amongst the PB abilities, costing a card instead of a dice and being repeatable during the round. To win with Coal the question often becomes how to get the most opportunities and value out of your slashes, without milling yourself to fatigue with card draw, or running out of cards in hand to actually play with your dice. Either you need to be a little more conservative than you might expect, slashing at key moments to remove 1 life enemies, or alternative go for the win quickly with Coal, spamming **Slash** as much as possible before running out of a deck becomes a problem.

In general main action direct damage pairs nicely with the additional side action **Slash**. You always want to be spending your resources on killing enemy units before they have a chance to exhaust for any value. **One Hundred Blades** is generally the superior option **Final Stand** and can nicely to combed with slash to simultaneously take out 2 and 1 life remaining units. Nonetheless, I like **Final Stand** as a nasty surprise for taking out an expensive unit when your opponent thought they were somewhat safe.

**Deck Styles:** There are two main ways to deck build around Coal in my opinion. To best use the **Slash** ability you going to need cards, so one way to build your deck is around a card drawing engine. The sheer amount of dice-less direct damage can be extremely hard for your opponent to deal with. Alternatively with a more expensive spell board of conjurations you can **Slash** more with the 5 cards you draw every round, since you already have something to spend your dice on.

The side action nature of **Slash** means you can play a strange mixture of aggression and control with Coal. Take over the battlefield and destroy your enemies by flinging cards at them, but also use the windows of opportunity your slashes open to attack the enemy PB. If the game is a close one with both players low on health, Coal can put pressure on early in the round by dumping their hand at the opponent and swinging an attack in for the win.

**Common Combos:** There are a few different options for extra card draw in a Coal deck, but **Wishing Wing** has the highest potential, since the more tokens you stack on it, the more cards you draw. You can include whatever parts you want of the entire time dice ready spell token support package. **Time Hopper** and **Tidal Crab** to add extra tokens, **Seafoam Snapper** to ensure the **Wishing Wing** dies and you get the card draw when you need it, and **Fighting Spirit** as a payoff for all your units inevitably dying. Even with only one source of extra tokens or the focus 2 effect on its own card, **Wishing Wing** can be enough card draw for a lot of **Slashing**.

**Abundance** on the other hand offers a very different kind of card draw, one that strangely leans Coal into mill. Without this card playing for fatigue damage seems like an odd choice for Coal, since you might **Slash** your way out of a deck faster than you can mill your opponent, but the consistency of **Abundance's** extra 2 cards per round is a hard opportunity to pass up so you might as well also try to leverage the potential burn damage if your opponent runs out of a deck and you can get all 3 copies into play.

**Fester** is another common card worth mentioning. The side action slash followed up instant death can be the cheapest removal in the entire game, and a worthy inclusion in any Coal deck.

### **Proven Competitive Lists:**

Mbauers' LKA V Top 4 Battlefield Control Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/ddade9ae-5036-4292-93b0-04ee5d7ad688/>

Brian's SB Worlds 2022 Top 2 Wishing Wing Deck <https://ashes.live/decks/share/759bff2a-1634-4b67-a663-2073ff8a1558/>

Mbauers' SB Worlds 2022 Top 4 Spindown Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/cf330532-27e3-445f-aa05-0364f36cdb75/>

**My Best Homebrew:** <https://ashes.live/decks/share/96dc4827-514c-449c-9ec5-6bed9ac9ae24/>

Helping me get my 10 wins with Coal is this tricky but incredibly fun wound token deck. Use **Tidal Crab** and **Wishing Wing** for some classic Coal card draw ammunition. Then in later rounds, the spell board and allies are so expensive that you should be able to toss quite a few cards away from hand for **Slash**. With only 2 time dice just make sure to summon the **Wishing Wing** first before the **Tidal Crab**!

Combo **Infuriate** on the **Dread Wraith** with **Flute Mage** for multiple attacks. **Adept Duelist** can be key for removing your opponent's annoying **Root Armor** and **Slash Fester** for anything else large enough to be a threat. **Blood Brawl** is the key to the deck, between **Dread Wraith** attacking or blocking an enemy unit, **Old Salt** and **Phoenix Attendant** you should be able to set up a nasty 3+ damage wipe on your opponent, and finish the stragglers with a **Slash**.

## Jessa



**How to win:** Jessa's **Screams of the Departed** offer a strange inversion of most PB abilities which usually help you establish control of the battlefield or empower the rest of your deck. Instead **Screams** offer a way to close out the game, adding inevitability to your strategy. The key is to identify when and how much to **Scream**, too early and your opponent will convert their battlefield advantage into victory, too late and you'll struggle against an opponent with a different powerful PB ability that's helping them win the game.

**Fear** is a fantastic removal card which can even avoid your opponent's on death triggers as a bonus. The downside of killing your own unit can be turned into an advantage with your own cards that trigger on death. **Playtime** in contrast is a generally much less powerful card but for a more prison focused blood puppet deck is a great inclusion. 1 dice for 1 **Blood Puppet** is the normal ratio for your summoning book which isn't that amazing value. Avoid deliberately killing the unit

you attach this card to and play it on a fairly large unit, locking down the board and frustrating your opponent.

**Deck Styles:** The ratio of 1 dice for 1 burn **Screams of the Departed** provides isn't as good as the best dedicated burn cards you can play in Ashes Reborn. There's 2 ways to deck build around this fact, focus on your deck providing a means to control the battlefield and use **Screams** to finish off your opponent in a close game once their health drops low, or go all in on burn, spending your dice in later rounds not only on more efficient burn cards but also on **Screams**, for a big burst of direct PB damage.

Besides the burn Jessa always provides to finish off your opponent, a great number of styles are available. You can play super aggressively and try to hit your opponents life total as quickly as possible, though you'll need to focus on bigger units like 3 dice cost knights, since your battlefield of 4 prevents you from going wide. You can alternately play prison, with blood puppets or even a kneel deck. In general your plan is to slow the game down enough for your **Screams** to eventually win the game. If you really play your prison cards right your opponent might have leftover dice each round while you've spent yours on **Screams**.

Whichever deck strategy you play, don't **Scream** too early! You'll want to avoid any in round 1 for example while you setup your board, which will put you at a disadvantage vs an opponent with a powerful ability they get to use while yours is irrelevant. However, stabilize in time and **Jessa** can make it look easy, screaming your way to victory.

**Common Combos:** Chants are often used in conjunction with **Fear**, since you'll be killing your own units. **Chant of Revenge** is the common choice, and you can double down with **Ritualist** round 1 for maximum burn. As well as **Fear** you can also run **Blood Chains** or **Reclaim Soul**. These cards will ensure you don't get clogs as well as triggering your chant engine. Since you're slowing down the game and can't afford to play too aggressively mid round with such a tiny battlefield, **Butterfly Monk** or **Turtle Guard** are often used to try to survive while you **Scream**. Then of course there is the usual duo of hyper efficient burn cards, **Sympathy Pain** and **Final Cry** often included to match Jessa's general burn victory plan.

Alternatively you can try to get maximum puppeteering with all three **Playtime**, **Summon Blood Puppet** and **Blood Puppeteer**. Mix in **Chant of Transfusion** to remove wounds from your opponent's puppet "friends" and some self sacrifice tools to ensure your **Puppeteer** actually dies at the right time.

### **Proven Competitive Lists:**

Brancus' LKA IV Top 4 Burn Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/25601f86-829b-4652-a5e2-6fff91982a55/>

Ebfritz's LKA IV Top 4 Burn Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/5343b4de-910e-4789-a151-c21e9a695969/>



Brancus' LKA II Top 4 Burn Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/43a5002a-9510-44e9-9105-1244c9439e39/>

**My Best Homebrew:** <https://ashes.live/decks/37164/>

How much burn can you burn? The answer is yes. Helping me get 10 wins with Jessa is this slightly silly and a little evil version of Jessa burn. Other decks take time to setup and use **Chant of Revenge** or something else to gain board control. Bah, who needs any of that stuff where you are burning your opponent all the time every time!

Start with the **Light Bringer** book and then play **Hunt Master**. The goal here is you then summon the **Light Bringer**, force them to attack (which you guard) and then hit their PB with everything you've got. After the goal is simple, survive and **Scream!**

In round 2 you'll obviously draw 1 copy of **Meteor** and all the burn spells. Wipe the board at exactly the right time just before your opponent swings for damage and finish them off with some burn and also some more burn. **Law of Fear** also works to slow down your opponent from actually achieving anything while you spend everything else on burn. Bonus points if your opponent is playing a low life total PB like Coal, it might be a short game.

## Leo



**How to win:** The **Glow Finch** is an extremely high value unit, a basic dice sink to provide flexibility to your other cost, often sought after unit guard and when it dies you're actually pretty happy since you get to mill 2 cards and summon it again next round. The key to getting the most

out of the **Glow Finch** is therefore in 2 part, the cheap and easy guard and the mill.

**Anguish** is an interesting card, since you might think its also a mill card of sorts, forcing your opponent to discard cards and lose dice. In reality your opponent usually simply cannot afford to lose those dice and cards, so **Anguish** actually ends up being a fairly powerful burn card instead! This puts Leo on a strange third trajectory. If things weren't confusing enough for Leo, **Gifted Rose** represents another potential line of play, making key big attacks you really want to hit their target, essentially Harold's amazingly powerful **Hunter's Mark** (he is the number 2 PB in the list for a reason) but at a cost of 1 dice.

Its worth noting here that neither unique card is particularly powerful compared to other PBs, the value of Leo is mostly in his **Glow Finch**. Some players will even build decks with neither card included if they don't suit the deck.

**Deck Styles:** With all these different powerful yet different elements deckbuilding for Leo can be tricky but rewarding. The most obvious place to start is the 2 mill you get from the **Glow Finch**. With an all out mill list you can also use the **Finch** to protect your other mill units. Slow the game down enough and your opponent will eventually (or quickly with what they call **Turbo Mill**) lose to fatigue. Alternatively you can focus on the unit guard of **Glow Finch**, with the mill an incidental nicety if the game turns into a longer slog. Control the battlefield with **Gifted Rose**, and play big key attackers you know you can protect and hit hard with. Finally with **Anguish** you can even play a strange mill burn hybrid. After all, what is fatigue damage if not burn that takes a while to kick in?

**Common Combos:** If spamming the **Glow Finch** is your kind of thing, then consider the common inclusion of **Generosity** to summon it more than once per round. If your opponent refuses to kill the **Finch** or perhaps even more annoyingly exhausts it, **Redirect** or **Natures Wrath** can be nice ways to ensure it dies anyway and you can resummon it.

Charm dice in general are a good fit for Leo mill decks, with the usual suspects of **Farewell**, **Rile the Meek**, **Flock Shepherd** and any combination of the 0 attack charm summons for your spell board. **Abundance** can also work well if your goal is to mill your opponent as quickly as possible.

For getting value out of **Gifted Rose** the same logic here applies that it did for Harold's **Hunter's Mark**. Units like **Sonic Swordsman** that benefit from ensuring their attacks don't get guarded can be a nasty combo.

### **Proven Competitive Lists:**

Brian's LKA VI Top 2 PACT Battlefield Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/49061/>

Brian's LKA IV Top 2 Mill Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/50977/>

Carl's Gifted Rose Deck (LKA VI Top 4 by Alfred): <https://ashes.live/decks/share/7f174d8d-e0ba-460b-abff-911a40ac82c4/>

Killercactus' LKA I Top 4 Turbo Mill Deck <https://ashes.live/decks/share/bb7aaf92-5dc0-454e-9d93-3ced8d865833/>

**My Best Homebrew:** <https://ashes.live/decks/46398/>

Helping me get my 10 wins with Leo is this 0 attack spam deck, pumping out enough units in round 1 to give anyone trouble!

After summoning all your 0 attack units in round 1, play **Gates Thrown Open** to do it all again! you'll lose a few units to attacks of course, but hopefully not before you mill your opponent with a **Glow Finch** guard. Time it right and you can summon **Shimmer Wings** back to back, threatening the **Eternity Flame**. After banging their head against your wall, the opponent will run out of cards from hand and deck and have no option but to start attacking fatigue damage.

## Saria



**How to win:** With a massive life total of 20 Saria is going to be in the game for a while, and threaten some explosive power and some subtle power while doing so. In most cases you want to play with **Seaside Raven** one of the best summons in the game. Your opponent will inevitably try to play around their units getting eaten, but the threat alone can be powerful. And of course, given the option snaking on a lovely 2 health 2 dice unit doesn't get much sweeter with **Prey**. For later rounds, **Willpower** is just an incredibly high value removal card, you don't even really need to deck build around, just play it early in the round to take whatever you feel like off the board. **Hearts Pull** is where things get a little tricky since on the face of it mill 1 and draw 1 for 1 dice is



pretty good but not exactly what you need every round. Should your opponent pass before you, is a really nice side action ability to trigger before passing yourself, just like a frog dice power.

**Deck Styles: Seaside Raven** is a powerful unit on the battlefield, but often you have to wait for the right time to play it. **Hearts Pull** also leans into a more long term plan with incidental milling. I find therefore Saria usually suits a control style of gameplay, not so extreme to give up control of the board, but something that is happy to pass early in the round and force your opponent to make mistakes. Having 3 basic sinks with **Seaside Raven** is something you can utilize to play a more particular dice spread without leftover awkward dice and nothing to spend them on.

**Common Combos: Seaside Raven** offers some fun combos to get the best value from the super powerful prey ability. **Body Inversion** can be used to swap the stats of a low attack unit and feed them to the hungry bird. **Resummon** can get you double the bird each round. Attacking with quick strike often leaves the **Seaside Raven** alive for resummoning and if your opponent kills the **Raven**, at least you can summon it next turn and get the **Prey** effect again.

### Proven Competitive Lists:

Ninja's LKA III Top 2 Burn Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/49140/>

Carl Diaz's LKA VIII Top 2 Paladin Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/896fd751-f0ab-49fd-944f-fa0d702f034e/>

Ninja's LKA VIII Top 2 Battlefield Mill Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/a3f53845-740d-445a-ab21-504cc2ea4b84/>

Mbauers' LKA III Top 4 Control Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/5298a54a-da73-4656-a84e-8c14f3e67885/>

Mbauers' SBI 2022 Top 4 Mill Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/c560530f-be57-4a60-a59f-3b49b7cf67ed/>

**My Best Homebrew:** <https://ashes.live/decks/49272/>

Helping me get my 10 wins with Saria is this hybrid mill battlefield deck with tons of removal. Each type of threat has an answer, **Farewell** and **Willpower** can take care of large units, **Seaside Raven** and **Ice Trap** can eat mid-range units like nothing else can, and between **Ruby Cobra** and the ping damage from **Adaptodon**, **Enchanted Violinist** and **Return to Soil** you've got something for 1 life units as well. Should you need to, you can lean into bypass with **Clashing Tempers** to take out blockers for an attack, or the classic **Wallop** on a **Frostback Bear**.

The idea here is that while destroying your opponents units and trying to control the battlefield, you're also milling your opponent slowly, so a long game can benefit you as well as your opponent goes to fatigue. Don't focus on mill too much though, the priority here is battlefield control. If you

can afford to get a cheeky **Heart's Pull** in before passing in a round, all the better but don't feel like you have to use the ability if you can spend your dice elsewhere.

## Xander



**How to win:** Another Phoenixborn with maxed out life points of 20, Xander can outlast a lot of damage, and the recursion of **Reincarnate** make him somewhat mill resistant as well. The key then for Xander is to play the long game, a nasty counter pick against burn and mill, but with a semi-one sided battlefield wipe **Earthquake**, unlike other Phoenixborn Xander doesn't have to rely entirely on alternative win conditions or strange play styles to win, he can play the battlefield pretty effectively.

**Reincarnate** isn't something you want to incorporate into your first five, it's just too inefficient. Instead you can build your deck around a key ally, and bring it back when it dies, using **Reincarnate** as the ultimate backup plan. If that ally is important enough to your strategy, then your opponent will get frustrated when they see it return, even though it costs an extra dice. **Reincarnate** also allows you to leave the ceremonial dice type behind without losing out on ally recursion, something that's worth considering when deckbuilding. **Earthquake** is a super powerful card to be able to rely on to wipe your opponent of cheap swarming enemies as well as a large unit. Consider running units with **Armored** or simply higher life totals that 1 to survive the damage and make the wipe even more one sided. Try to time the **Earthquake** to hit something big enough with the 4 damage and watch out for a illusion or time power side showing in your opponent's dice pool, they may have first fived **Fate Reflection** against you.

**Deck Styles:** Since Xander's power is quite generic, with excellent stats and resistant to both mill and burn strategies, he plays best with a solid plan B and a pivot depending on matchups. Against

a PB trying to mill you out to fatigue damage, you can focus on reducing your meditations, putting on battlefield pressure the while game, and recurring allies with **Reincarnate**. A key **Earthquake** might be enough to secure you the battlefield. Against a burn deck you can focus on pumping out as much attack as possible, with big units and the extra time your high health affords you in the matchup. Your plan B needs to be pretty solid however, since against the powerful battlefield focused PB like **Harold** and **Rin**, you may struggle to obtain an edge. Instead, you can develop your own plan B alternative win condition incrementally, while not giving up too much battlefield presence.

**Common Combos:** For an insane amount of survivability, **Heal**, **Butterfly Monk** and/or the classic PACT **Phoenix Attendant** and **Chant of Transfusion** combo can be used to heal your life points. Just make sure you actually have a plan to somehow win while surviving damage.

**Frostback Bear** or **Turtle Guard** can work well with Xander since a unit with 3 health can thrive in an **Earthquake** rich environment. If you do run a bunch of high health units that can survive the **Earthquake**, **Blood Brawl** can be a powerful follow up the next turn.

### Proven Competitive Lists:

Ninja's LKA VI Winning 0/2 Fatigue Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/7c8802d7-585b-4a26-9317-e96fbed9593c/>

Brancus' LKA V Top 2 Burn PACT Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/52072/>

**My Best Homebrew:** <https://ashes.live/decks/share/491775c3-d59f-407e-978d-943c2297ee43/>

Helping me get my 10 wins with Xander and win LKA VI is this removal heavy 0/2 mill list. Each of the 3 summons have 0 attack and 0 health, so they can benefit from **Flock Shepherd's** protective abilities. Try to sequence the **Flock Shepherd** after you have a **Gilder** in play, who then should be able to protect you from at least 1 lethal attack to the **Flock Shepherd**. Later in the game, you can recur the **Flock Shepherd** with **Reincarnate**, which can be very annoying for your opponent if they are expending a lot of effort to kill it the first time.

**Shimmer Wing** can put a lot of pressure on your opponent to swing at units, which can save you in the long game. You generally want to attack promptly with **Ruby Cobra** for the mill, unless your opponent only has an alert unit don't be too precious about lining up the perfect attack, you don't want to have the **Ruby Cobra** attacked itself. **Farewell** is as powerful as ever, don't waste it on a low health unit if you can help it, taking out a 4 health knight for 4 dice is definitely worth it for the 4 mill. The more you can keep your 0/2 around for the next round the more likely you can pull off a nasty **Rile the Meek**, 2 damage is acceptable to kill one or 2 key enemy units, 3+ damage from **Rile the Meek** and you are having a wonderful time.

0/2s work well with **Earthquake** but there isn't much strategy here, just value, since your 2 health units won't die from the **Earthquake**. Finally its worth considering using Reincarnate on **Rose Gardener** if you don't draw into it. Spam cultivate side actions until you have enough class sides

for a big **Farewell** without eating into your own deck.

## Koji



**How to win:** The boy wonder of ashes is all about status tokens and having a massive battlefield. **Accelerate Growth** is free, often the sign of a good PB abilities, and can pump out a token every round wherever it is needed. With 10 battlefield (the largest in the game) you basically don't have to worry about getting clogged or stuck in an awkward battlefield prison, so feel free to ditch those self-sacrificing cards in favour of spamming lots of cheap units without a care in the world. Your starting point for exploiting Koji is to work out what will best benefit from status tokens, and building your deck around those cards. **Wolfpack Leader** provides an inbuilt beneficiary for the **Accelerate Growth**, but only use it to get an extra **Pack Wolf** if the tokens run out and you won't hit the conjuration limit. Even without any extra tokens, the **Wolfpack Leader** is fantastic value and a worthy inclusion in the first five. **Lick Wounds** is a less obviously powerful option, but does provide the flexibility of even more status tokens from Koji becoming unexhausted, or a unit swinging twice in the round.

**Deck Styles:** Koji's big problem is his low life point value at only 16, going aggro can be difficult without dying first. Nevertheless, one option for Koji is to fully unitize his large battlefield and swarm the field. For this strategy I'd recommend attacking often, and don't let your battlefield of unexhausted 1 life units build up and get decimated by a **Nature's Wrath**. Another option for Koji is to focus on the status token combo. Find a card to really exploit with status tokens, and pack the removal, protection and control tools to ensure that it happens.

**Common Combos:** You can't talk about Koji without talking about the specific cards he can add a status token to. Having a few of these cards in your deck to exploit is the key to success. The most

powerful is the **Indiglow Creeper** who has no in built way of getting status tokens, but rockets in value every time you trigger the **Luminous Seedling's Blossom** ability and turn it into 2 **Brilliant Thorns**. With a large, swarming deck, **Hunt Master** can be topped up, turning your **Accelerate Growth** into an extra free attack. Sticking a status token on **Guilt Link** provides a sneaky guaranteed kill, and with Koji you'll probably have a unit you don't mind dying lying around somewhere. Just don't do it if it looks like your opponent will attack and give you the token anyway. **Mirror Spirit** and **Wishing Wing** gain attack from status tokens, as does the **Emberoot Lizard**, so may be worth including. Then you can all the other status token support cards, like the ever valuable **Gilder** or ultimate spam unit the **Time Hopper**.

A different direction to take Koji is to combo with **Fallen the** slow moving ultimate value engine that's perfect for his massive battlefield. You could also consider a **Prism Tetra** build for similar reasons, even the janky but fun **Radiant Leviathan** has a sort of a home with Koji.

### Proven Competitive Lists:

Carl's Phoenix Pod II Top 4 Creeper Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/c22685b7-610a-459c-a6f0-9c1cbef390b7/>

Ninja's SB LCQ Top 4 Creeper Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/share/c22685b7-610a-459c-a6f0-9c1cbef390b7/>

My Best Homebrew: <https://ashes.live/decks/55382/>

Helping me get my 10 wins with Koji is this classic **Indiglow Creeper** list that's all about cracking open those seeds! Everything is centred around the creeper. The **Gilder** keeps the **Luminous Seedling** alive and gives it a token upon death. The **Tidal Crab** is the ultimate token dispensing machine for the **Seedling**.

If your opponent refuses to counter the **Creeper**, use **Seeds of Aggression** with your exhausted **Creeper** and take it out along with an enemy. **Fate Reflection** can protect your **Seedling** from direct damage effects like annoying **Odette** and **Aradel**. Then, should you still have extra tokens, stick them on the **Wolfpack Leader** or the **Hunt Master**. Build up wave after wave of **Brilliant Thorns** and outvalue your opponent to death on the battlefield!

## Echo





**How to win:** Echo is all about those nasty blue exhaustion tokens, and manipulating them to your benefit. A good Echo play can leave your opponent feeling helpless, since you're taking away their ability to use their units effectively!

**Gravity Flux** is a combo ability, having no value on its own (since the token only lasts for that turn), but having value when combined with different main actions. The most straightforward combo you have available to you is to turn any attack into a counter-less quick strike-esque attack. **Gravity Flux** an enemy unit and then swinging for the kill will be enough to make your opponent Phoenixborn Guard early, or accept a one sided unit death that would normally get to trade with your unit.

**Chaos Gravity** has the amazing potential value of 3 total exhaustion tokens, the key to getting the best value from it is to build up a battlefield state that benefits from the token shift part of the card. First you want a powerful unit to remove an exhaustion token from. That can ideally be a three dice knight like **Sonic Swordsman** but it can also be something a little less powerful like a 2 dice summon **Winged Lioness** or **Ruin Dweller** ect. Your opponent will no doubt have something worth exhausting, unless they are in real trouble. Moving 1 exhaustion token from a unit to another unit controlled by the same player, is where your deck could actually benefit from weaker units. Working towards a battlefield with 2 exhausted powerful units and 1 weak 1 dice ally like **Fire Archer** can produce ultimate value from your unique, but it can be tough to setup. Keep an eye out for the same setup on your opponent's board, keeping a weak enemy unit alive can be worth it, to switch their exhaustion token with your opponent's knight!

**Deck Styles:** Echo decks are usually a unique kind of aggressive control. You want units that are worth unexhausting, so that means beefy units that can survive an advantageous attack or combo with **Gravity Flux**. You can try to trade out the battlefield in a traditional manner, swinging for the

win when you have dominance, or you can focus on bypassing your opponent's units altogether. An Echo with a top of round swing is very scary, since you can simply remove a blocker from the equation using **Gravity Flux**! This can make end game battlefield maths go very well for the king of blue tokens, since you can also leave an enemy unit left alive the round before.

**Common Combos:** **Chaos Gravity** has a few common combinations with powerful knights that get value from attacking. **Sonic Swordsman** and **Realm Walker** stand out as the best attack trigger units in the game, **Realm Walker** in particular can be downright oppressive, but the 3 life total makes them very vulnerable to removal. **Hunt Master** provides a great target for **Chaos Gravity** double exhaustion with the **Panther Spirit**. **Light Bringer** is great in any deck, and can be particularly good in Echo to force the battlefield into the exhaustion heavy game state you want. Once everything is exhausted, **Mirror Spirit** is a common inclusion to benefit from all the blue tokens.

There are also a few card specific common combos for **Gravity Flux**. **False Demon** can ping something before it has a chance to act. A counter intuitive but very powerful combo is possible with **Kneel** by using **Gravity Flux** on your own unit. Because it already has a fake exhaustion token it won't be effected by **Kneel**, leaving everything else but your unit exhausted once the turn ends.

### Proven Competitive Lists:

Apple Sith's Phoenix Pod I 2023 Top 4 Battlefield Bypass Deck:

<https://ashes.live/decks/share/f3e93161-df95-4c47-93dd-06da4806549b/>

Carl's SB March 2022 Winning Battlefield Bypass Deck:

<https://ashes.live/decks/share/0f614f1e-6402-41a1-90bc-14826b74a6b4/>

**My Best Homebrew:** <https://ashes.live/decks/56292/>

Helping me get my 10 wins with Echo is this control heavy battlefield bypass deck, which aims to setup a powerful board state and convert that control into massive damage attacks to your opponent.

**Wallop** is the key card here, the goal is to attach it to something you can then unexhausted with **Chaos Gravity** or

**Flute Mage**. Combo **Gravity Flux** with a **False Demon** summon, or if your opponent has a 2 life unit, force a nasty non-trade with **Gravity Flux** and one of your many attackers like **Frostback Bear**. Wait for the end of round to get the most attack on a **Mirror Spirit** (if you really need the extra status token you can also do a cheeky **Gravity Flux** combo here as well.)

If the opportunity arises and you think you can dodge the removal, this deck can use bypass to deal massive amount of damage with **Beast Mage**, **Frostback Bear**, one of the alternation cards like **Clashing Tempers**, and unexhaustion from **Chaos Gravity** or **Flute Mage**. But it can also win by just trying to control the battlefield instead, converting those attacks into dead enemy units.

# C Tier

## Aradel



**How to win:** Aradel threatens powerful and efficient removal. You always want to use her **Water Blast** ability every round, taking out an enemy unit the moment it gets played before it can provide any value. 2 damage is simply more damage than usual for 1 dice, and if you combo it with other, main action direct damage you can maximize your opponent's loss.

Unfortunately Aradel's lack of super strong unique card holds her back and in my C tier. **Blue Jaguar** can provide combo value to bypass your opponent's units, but the stats of 1 attack and 2 life for 2 dice are bad for even a non-unique. **Rejuvenate** has much greater potential in my opinion, unlocking the aggressive power of your conjurations. Once it's powered up with tokens, 1 dice for an unexhausted is definitely a good value proposition, just still not that mind blowing compared to other PB uniques.

**Deck Styles:** Since getting the most out of **Water Blast** is key to success, Aradel usually suits a battlefield control style of play. By removing a key enemy unit of your choice every turn, you can put a dampener on whatever would otherwise give you the most trouble of your opponent's spellboard. Controlling the battlefield this way could be the setup for a bypass combo deck, swinging over the heads of your opponent's exhausted units, or it could be something more straightforward, dominating the feild until you have a large attack. Key large attacks in general I think work well with Aradel, since **Water Blast** can be used to take out a key defender before hitting your opponent's PB directly.



**Common Combos:** When your opponent plays a 2 dice, 2 life unit on the field for you to **Water Blast**, you're in for a good time, and up 1 dice on your opponent already when you give them the almighty slap. However, why stop there? Main action direct damage like **Summon Guilder** is an extremely common combo with Aradel, since you can take out a 3 health unit in one go if the opportunity arises. Even something less straightforward like **Natures Wrath** or **Seeds of Aggression** can combo with **Water Blast** and get you to 3 damage.

**Blue Jaguar** can combo with other bypass tools like **Frostback Bear**. For bypass to work you'll need a big hit to your opponent's life total. **Massive Growth** in a classic to turn your **Frostback Bear** into a massive bear. **Exhortation** is the ultimate bypass combo dream and with the right setup can do crazy amounts of damage. Mirror Spirit can also explode into game ending damage land with **Explosive Growth**. Surprise your opponent's last blocker with a **Stand Still** or **Crescendo** and you might just be able to close out a game from nowhere.

**Rejuvenate** has a bunch of interesting potential targets. You can build your whole deck around **Indiglow Creeper** as one example. Using Aradel and **Rejuvenate** allows you to attack twice with the initial **Creeper**, assuming your opponent refuses to counter it (often the right move versus the annoying summon). As a backup, attacking twice with a 3/2 **Brilliant Thorn** is pretty powerful as well. **Ruby Cobra** is a 1 cost unit your opponent often has trouble dealing with efficiently so will often have the chance to attack more than once. With the right combo of damage or **Infuriate**, **Dread Wraith** can be a high value conjuration to attack with more than once, and if **Iron Rhino** wasn't such a janky investment of so many dice it could work well too.

### Proven Competitive Lists:

Brian's LKA II Top 2 Creeper Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/49769/>

**My Best Homebrew:** <https://ashes.live/decks/38905/>

Helping me get my 10 wins with Aradel is this dinosaur filled deck of big monsters. The plan here is to mount as many times as possible and simply use a constant attack of heavy hitters to take over the battlefield. **Archasaurus Mount** and **Cerasaurus Mount** have plenty of targets with all the 1 dice allies that have an on enter ability like **Fire Archer** and **Anchor naught**. Use **Butterfly Monk** to protect your big units and **Shepherd of Lost Souls** to recur your opponent's removal of your cheap allies. Aradel's 8 battlefield should allow you to spam as many units as you need, and the **Water Blast** will remove something mathematically problematic for your big dinos. Finally, when your opponent is low on life, you have quite a few ways of closing out the game, with **Frost Bite** burn, **Archasaurus** gigantic 2 bypass, **Cerasaurus** overkill or even just a wide swing with **Raptor Herder**.

## Noah



**How to win:** Noah is a tricky character to play against, since he can disrupt your spellboard plans with his **Shadow Target**, denying you a key summon each round. Understanding how to exploit this ability the most requires you to think about how your opponent will respond. In round 1 against Noah you'll most likely overload your hand with more cards than you can afford, to offset the lost spellboard slot. You might also keep your most important summon for later in the round, hoping Noah will waste the **Shadow Target** on the first book you play out. So when playing as Noah himself you can keep these strategies in mind. Consider not using the **Shadow Target** in round one, you'll still have disrupted their initial plans. Consider waiting, and trying to assess if the spellboard card they played is good enough to **Shadow Target**. Maybe the best is yet to come, and more expensive spellboard summons will be more disruptive to cancel. Keep the enemy guessing and it will be harder for them to play around your annoying ability.

**Summon Masked Wolf** is a hard card to justify even though it's a unique. The book tax makes the first time you summon a wolf cost 2 dice, not really worth it for the 2 attack 1 life stat line that usually only costs 1 dice in the ashes card pool. The focus effect is fantastic but the cost here is pretty bad as well since you're paying an extra dice again to play the second and third book! If you get through all that initial cost however there are some powerful swings you can make, utilizing the side action combo to spam out a bunch of units. Focus on trades and with a clear battlefield and the first turn of the next round you can potentially pump out an wide attack out of nowhere for the win. The side action summon of the **Masked Wolf** also prevents them from being weak to direct damage removal like Frog dice power or **Forked Lightning**, since you summon and attack with them in same turn the moment a nice target for the attack appears.

**Shadowblade** on the other hand is great value. Dealing 2 damage for 1 dice is pretty good and the fact that its a reaction spell makes it even better since your opponent can't safely attack with 1 health units without potentially leaving themselves vulnerable. The 2 card draw is a nice additional

benefit and allows you to deck build with slightly cheaper cards than usual, knowing you have the draw into more cards to play.

**Deck Styles:** Noah typically leans into aggressive trickster explosive attack decks or long term fatigue decks. **Shadow Target** can mess with your opponents plan, but doesn't necessarily give you a mathematical advantage in trades and winning the battlefield. Aggressive decks will therefore have to maximize your opponent's inability to summon the perfect answer for your threat, perhaps by summoning lots of 1 health units and preventing suppressing sources of single damage, or playing big knights and using **Shadow Target** anything with high attack. Fatigue focused decks will use **Shadow Target** to force their opponent to play cards from hand, instead of rely on their spellboard. It's a subtle way to mill someone, but in the late game in particular your opponent being unable to summon something can be crippling once they run out of other options.

**Common Combos:** There are a few possible common deck packages to use with Noah but they are less about combos and more about having a deck archetype that suits his style of play. In fast aggro decks, the classic status token summoning package of **Time Hopper**, **Wishing Wing** and **Fighting Spirit** can be put to good use, since Noah can potentially draw into even more books with **Shadowblade**. Accelerate can combo off with **Summon Masked Wolf**, **Time Hopper**, **Fighting Spirit** or even **Immortal Commander**, allowing you to suddenly attack with a massive army out of nowhere.

For fatigue deck and long terms plans, you'll need some way to accelerate your opponent to the end game with no deck, where **Shadow Target** can start really causing problems. Spindown cards like **Shadow Spirit** and **Dream Fracture** can provide pressure on your opponent to meditate, or you can go all in on illusion dice powers with **Reimagine** and **Keepsake**. **Abundance** is always worth considering when playing mill, along with the charm staples like **Orchid Dove**, **Farewell** and **Three-Eyed Owl**.

### **Proven Competitive Lists:**

Lark's Phoenix Pod I Winning Spindown Deck: <https://ashes.live/decks/47953/>

**My Best Homebrew:** <https://ashes.live/decks/47953/>

Helping me get my 10 wins with Noah is this fatigue spindown deck. The starting point of this deck is an **Abundance** deck that doesn't start with **Abundance** in the first five. Instead this deck aims to draw into it as end game damage, once your opponent is decked out. With **Magic Syphon** and the extra spindown effects of cards like **Dreamlock Mage** and **Hollow** you can put pressure on your opponent's deck without meditating your own spells. Then, without fuelling your opponent's plan an allowing them to draw lots of cards in the early game, use **Abundance** to finish off their deck and start dealing game winning direct damage.