

The Shuffle Bus

The Shuffle Bus played a pivotal role in driving fan-based competitive content for Ashes: Reborn from the game's launch until shortly after the final Time cycle's release in late 2022. Although the bulk of their biggest contributions were through video, Discord interactions, or competitive event commentary they also published several articles, available through their website at <https://theshufflebus.com> and archived here, as well.

NOTE: images in this archive are currently hotlinked against the original website, and much of the formatting from the original articles has been lost! Please read follow the links to read at the original Shuffle Bus URLs for the best experience.

- [Shuffle Busted: A Competitive Ashes Primer](#)
- [Ashes Reborn – Fiona’s Wraiths Deck List](#)
- [Hard 30 – Beyond the First Five part I](#)
- [Or, How I Learned to Love the Three-Eyed Owl](#)
- [Hard 30 – Good Draw, Bad Draw](#)
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Shuffle Busted: A Competitive Ashes Primer

Originally published at <https://theshufflebus.com/shuffle-busted-a-competitive-ashes-primer/> by **ShuffleBusNeil**; archived Jan. 9, 2023.

A Phoenix Rises Again

After 1,000 years of waiting the rebirth of the Phoenix is upon. Back in 2015 Plaid Hat Games produced the Ashes: Rise of the Phoenixborn expandable game system. Then, in 2019, the game went out of print after 16 expansions. This isn't a bad run for a game of this type, but if you're reading this you know in the year 2021 the firebird has come out of its hole and didn't see a shadow so we are getting the shiny, new, and rebooted Ashes:Reborn. This primer is to help you get into competitive Ashes Reborn play.

A Brand New Game

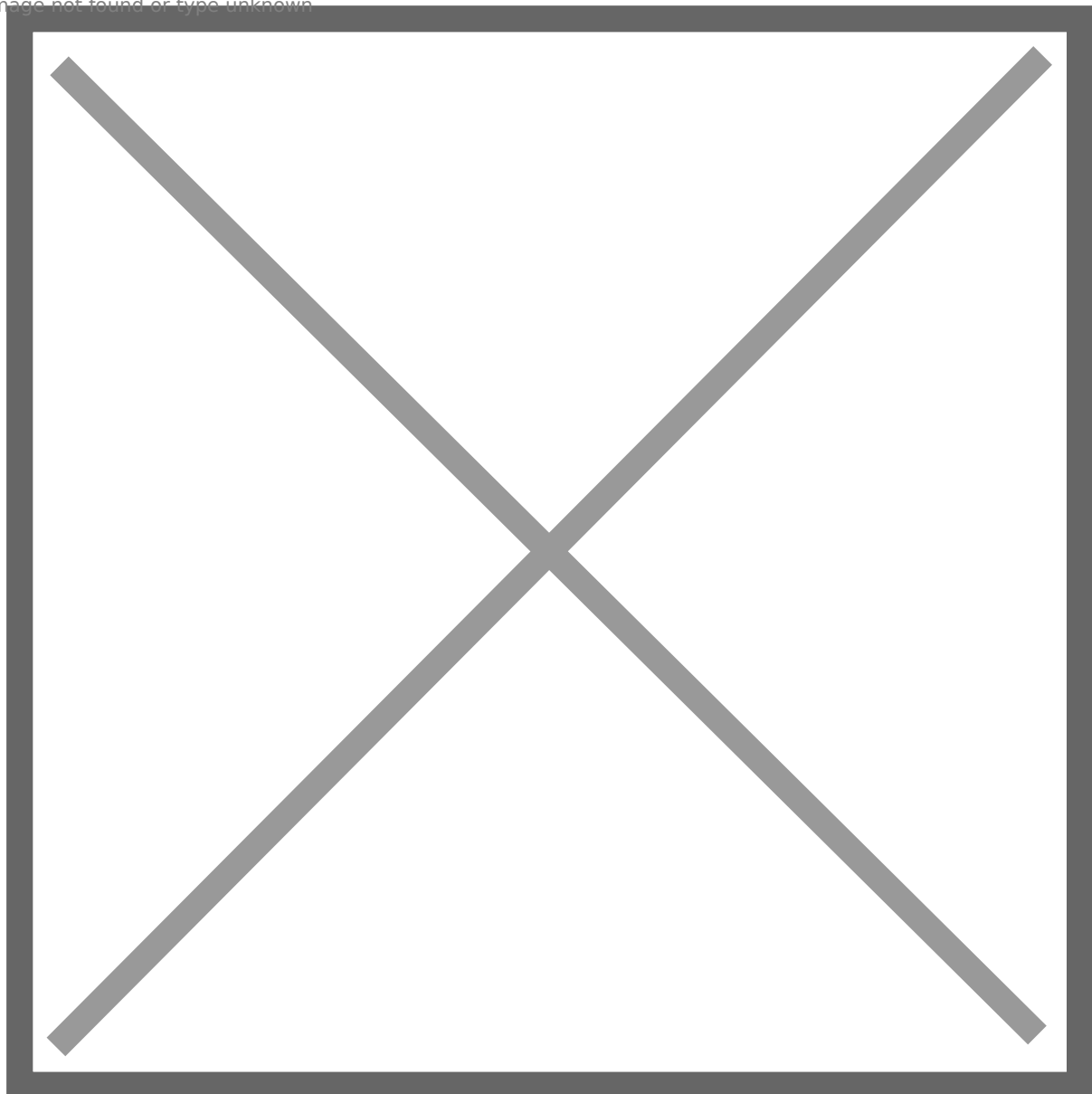
If you are an original ashes player you will see some fundamental changes to the rules and many drastically different wordings on your favorite cards. Most of the new iterations have wildly different effects than the original printings. But don't be discouraged, all of the changes to the cards and rules are positive. The game is quicker, less grindy, and overall more fun. This might sound like an opinion from someone that has played less than 10 games of the original. Well it is. But I'm also right, we'll go into more detail later. An extra bonus for the owners of the original printing is the upgrade kit for Reborn that you can purchase to just replace the things that changed and you can still use most of the set you already have. So go out and buy or preorder it (We are not a sponsor and do not benefit from your purchase).

Competitive Ashes?

This article is assuming you want some insight into competitive Ashes: Reborn. For the last 6 months the Shuffle Bus has been driving through Ashes country and I have learned a lot. Ashes has a lot of differences from the average competitive card game when it comes to general theory. The

biggest difference I see is that resources and resource management are almost the polar opposite of how most dueling card games function.

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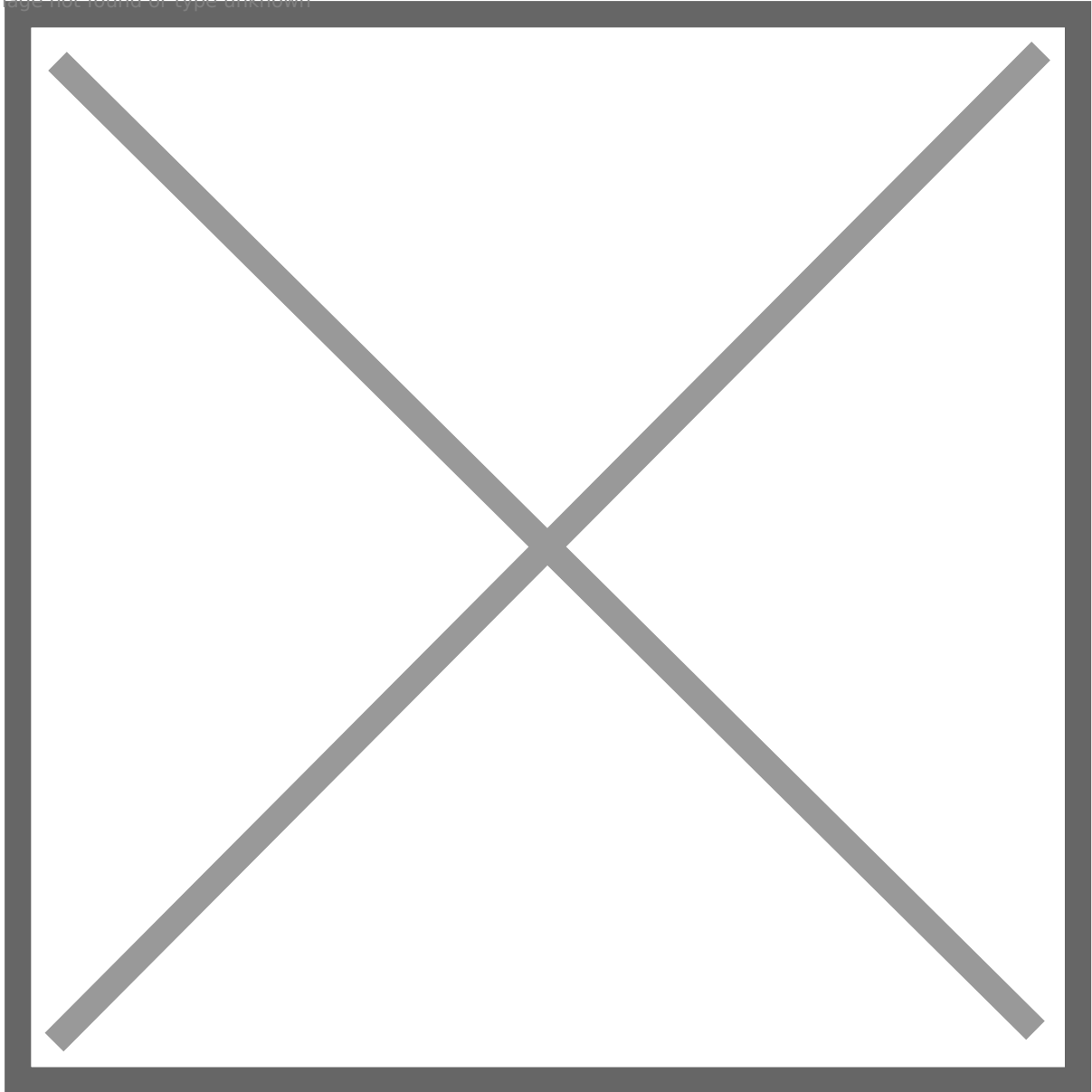


Dice

In Ashes both players begin their turn with all 10 dice available; never more, never less. This alters or down-right removes some staple strategies from other games. “Ramp” decks that try to amass more or faster resources and go over the top of their opponent don’t exist because I can’t get more than you fast or slow. Likewise, resource denial strategies that stunt growth or remove existing resources your opponent uses to play their cards could only exist if there were effects in the game that removed dice. We used to have both dice recursion for ramp and dice removal in Ashes 1.0 but they were too powerful or un-fun and have been removed from the Reborn pool. I don’t think the lack of these effects is inherently good or bad, it’s just how the game plays now and Reborn is great (see previous paragraph). We’ll talk about the archetypes the constant dice affects differently

later.

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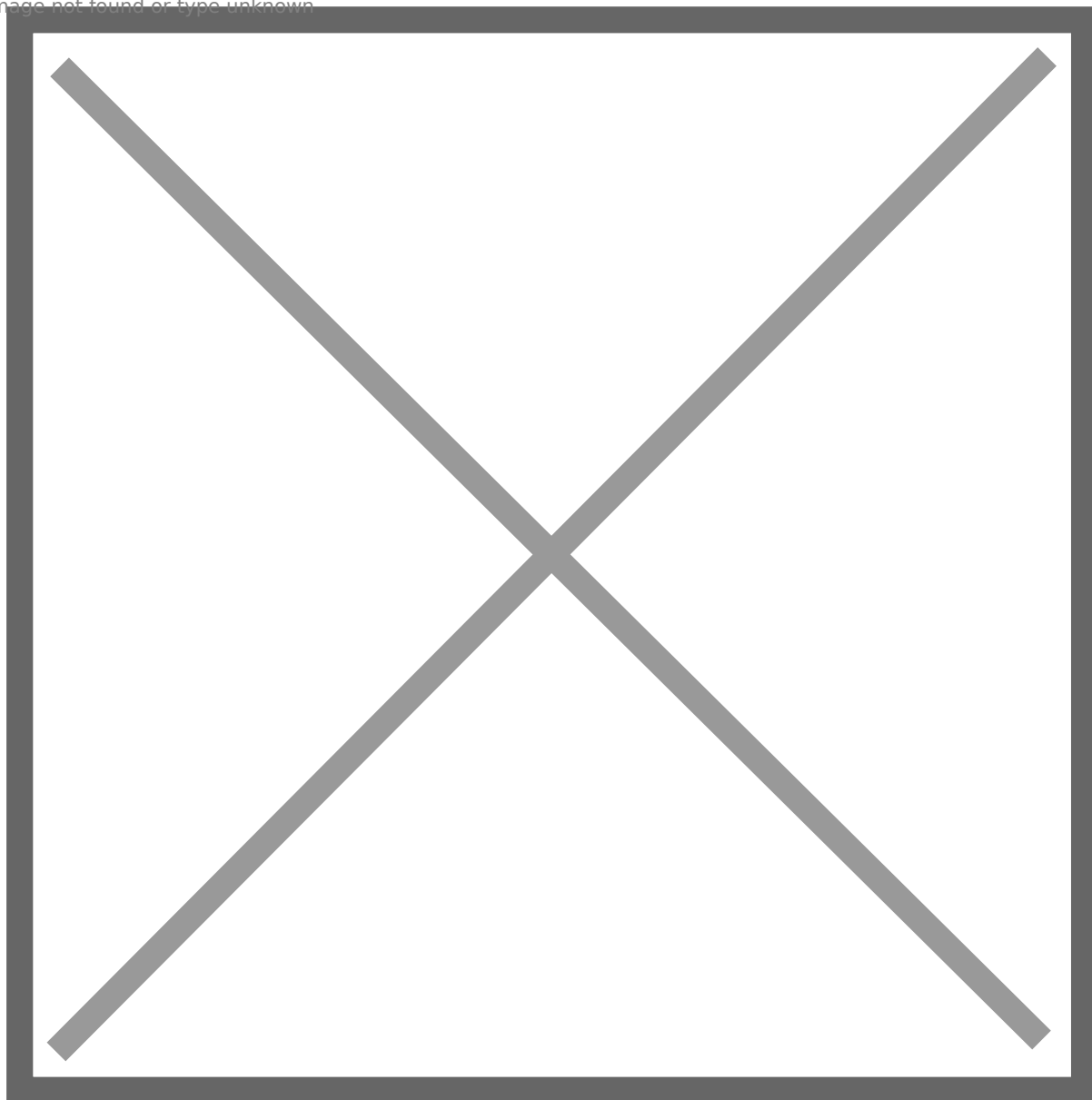


Cards

The other resource in the game is cards. Like most games card advantage is a good thing. But there are a few caveats to that statement. Because both players draw to a full hand of 5 every round, drawing more cards than your opponent isn't strictly good. It is usually good, but only when you can actually deploy the important threats and answers from your hand. If we were playing Magic and I drew more cards than you, I would win a majority of the time because I am generating a big differential in resources. But if I draw more than you in Ashes and at the end of the round you just refill to 5 while I only draw 1 the differential is gone. So if you can draw and play more cards than your opponent you will probably win. The other consideration to take into account regarding drawing is the number of cards left in your pile. It is very possible to deck yourself in a game with a 30 card pile and you draw 5 every round. For the most part this is not something I take into

account when deciding to make a play, draw a card, or mill a card off the pile. Obviously don't do it if it will kill you, but mostly the games seem to be fast enough you should take advantage of the size of your pile as a resource.

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Life and Deck Size

The last 2 resources I try to take advantage of in every game of Ashes are my life total and pile size. Like I just said, any cards you can use for some advantage from your pile you should usually take advantage of. The most common example is the meditate side action, just mill yourself. Unless you know for a fact that a card in your hand or spell board is useless for the remainder of the game, just mill yourself to meditate. You can use your Phoenixborn's life total in a similar fashion. Use your Phoenixborn's guard when you can every round unless it's going to kill you. The only point of life that really matters is the last one. Taking 3 is almost universally better than losing a card in play. I say almost because there will be times when you need to be careful playing around

with numbers that can kill you. Use your best judgement based on specific game situations, like don't go to 3 when your opponent has access to double natural power.

Archetypes? What Archetypes?

Now that we are all experts on the basics of resources, I will use "resources" to describe general advantages in more than one category and call out the specific resources by name. Let's get back to those archetypes mentioned earlier. The dice situation also changes how different decks look in Ashes. Before Ashes if you asked me to define deck archetypes I would use a spectrum from aggro to control, leaving the middle to be an ill-defined pile of what I'll call midrange.

Aggro

An aggro deck being one that wins by pressuring an opponent's resources early and fast, in most cases specifically pressuring the life total of an opponent. It wins by getting threats in before an opponent because those threats are cheaper/more efficient or by playing threats that bypass normal defensive strategies. In Ashes you are never really in a position to go under your opponent. If you play an efficient small unit I can take my turn to just play a bigger one. Because of the dice parity there isn't going to be a situation where you can play something I can't match right out of the gate. In fact, in most cases, the more aggressive deck wants to take most of its aggressive actions later in the round to get the best attacks for its units. Aggro decks in ashes still use efficiency and still try to apply early pressure, but due to the nature of the dice they can just play the same size units the mid-range and control decks can and will. The aggro decks in Ashes do follow the second trait in that they trend towards the units that are difficult to defend. Starting with units that are difficult to block like Frostback Bear. Or by deploying many units because they are cheap or units that make additional units. When you end up with a wider board than your opponent they simply can't block them all. Lastly, direct damage to the opponent falls into this category.

Control

On the other end of the spectrum, I would have defined a control deck as one that wins through card advantage and inevitability. The Ashes control deck takes a much more traditional look. You beat your opponent by answering their threats with answers that gain you a resource advantage. And you win the game after having stabilized the board and gained enough advantage to go on the offensive. In other games this would usually look like killing your opponent's threats and putting them on a low number of cards in hand that you don't have access to answers for. This won't usually be the case in Ashes because as I described above, we will just both refill to 5 and usually both have ready spells to activate. So the Ashes control deck will gain a resource advantage more often by playing answers that cost less dice than the thing they kill. Or by playing a threat that requires more dice or cards for the opponent to answer. We'll go into some specific examples later.

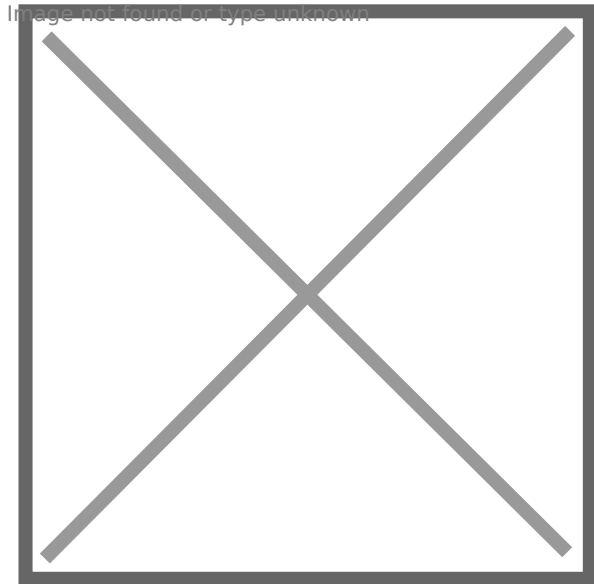
Mid-Range

So in general I've found that due to how the dice and card parity changes these archetypes almost every Ashes deck falls into the mid-range category where we trade resources from a common starting point every round and a very large advantage is rarely accumulated on either side. As an aside to this, what I would call a combo deck emerged among the community and in the Ashes International League. Through a combination of specific cards you are able to attack your opponent with a very large Shining Hydra and essentially kill them round one. This deck is aggressive but I still call it a combo deck not an aggro deck because it does one thing. If it gets to do its thing it will win, if it doesn't then it will lose. The powers that be have decided that is powerful enough that the cards Shining Hydra and Massive Growth have been pretty much universally restricted from a player's first 5 or from being played at all in the first round. I know this topic could be a whole separate article, and I did [here](#), but in general I think that deck doesn't do anything except force players to have 2 answers for a large unit in their pile and make them think about the decision to put them in their first 5. If you have strong feelings about it, please join our [discord](#) and @ me. I'd love to debate it.

Enough Theory Already!

So after all that long winded theory let's talk about some more specific examples of what decks and cards are actually good in the Reborn meta. Starting with the Phoenixborn, there are 16 and some of them are great and some, well, not so great. At a competitive level I would really only play (in no particular order) Brennen, Coal, Harold, Odette, Rin, and Xander. All of them have a very powerful ability and loyalty card. Again I'm sure this is a huge debate. Obviously there are a number that are still playable and can be competitive: Aradel, James, Jessa, Leo, Noah, and probably others based on what kind of meta you are going into, My issue with them is that either their ability or loyalty card is lackluster in some or all situations. And I'm not saying you can't play any of the others, just that they are low power level. If you go to First Five Friday and want to play your casual Vikki deck, you are a man or woman after my own heart. Poor Vikki really got the axe in Reborn and now can only be one of the greatest of all time and my future wife.

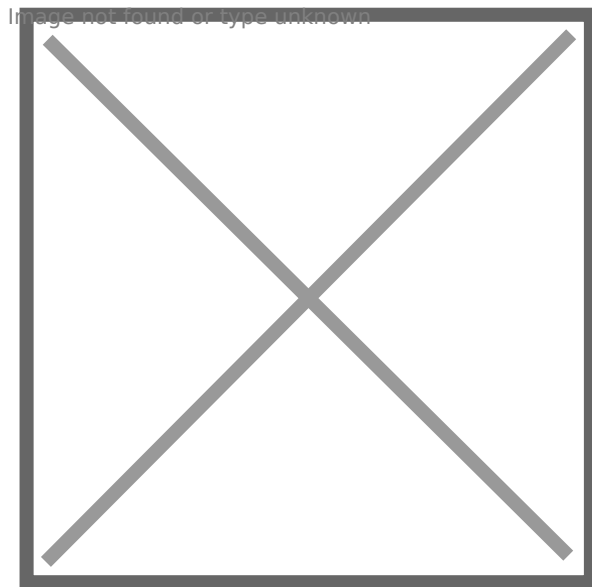
As far as cards go I'm going to be using my favorite metaphor for how good they are and how they function and it's almost on theme with the bus. There are 2 types of cards: cards that make gas and cards that need gas. Cards that make gas are cards that generate a resource advantage all by themselves. Obviously cards that need gas are the opposite, they do something when you spend resources. In general, cards that make gas are great at competitive levels in all games. Cards that need gas are good sometimes, but not always.



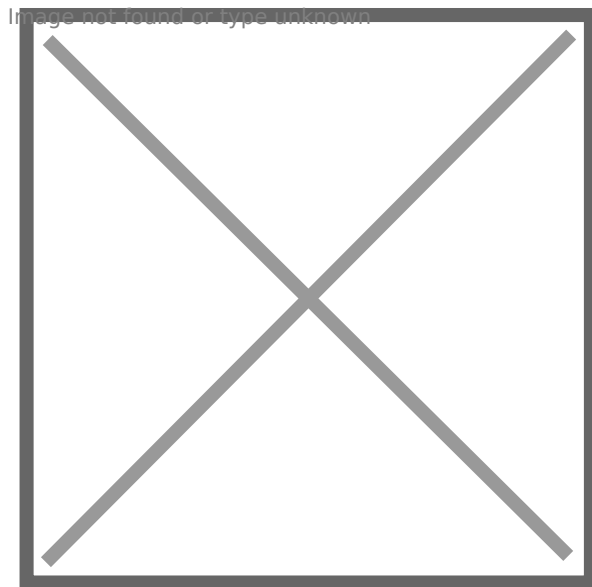
If you have been watching any of our content, or honestly just existing in the Reborn community, you know that River Skald is the greatest thing since sliced bread. This guy is a gas machine. Is he an efficient unit? Yes. Is he card advantage? Yes. Is he an answer to cards that cost way more than he does? Yes. Is he good in aggro? Yes. Is he good in control? Does he keep me warm at night? Yes. This card does it all and is my pick for number one best card in the Reborn pool. If you are playing Ashes you will see this card being played, preferably by you because otherwise you are likely getting blown out. He's not going to win you the game by himself, but he is going to generate a huge resource advantage regardless of what mode you play him in. Bonus points for anyone that plays him just to draw a card. Playing him and not killing something usually means you are crushing your opponent. He also has that added advantage of not really being the kind of card you can prepare for other than just make informed plays with the thought in mind that your opponent could have one. Because even if you have the Golden Veil ability it's probably better for you than if you didn't have the Veil, but you still got 2-for-1' by a 2 dice unit.

Ok, enough about our lord and master Skald, some other good cards you will consistently see in competitive play are the good summon books. All the books make gas by definition, always being an X-for-1 where X is the number of times you activate the book in a game. But because your opponent will likely also have books, you want your X-for-1's to beat theirs. The best ones in my opinion are (in no particular order):

Top Tier Summons

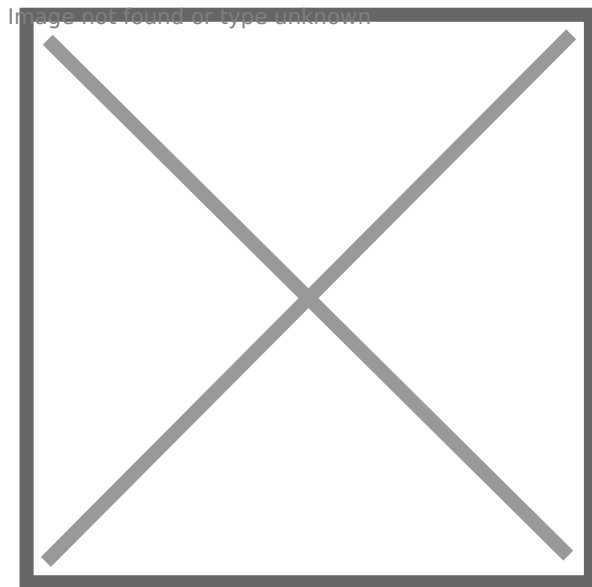


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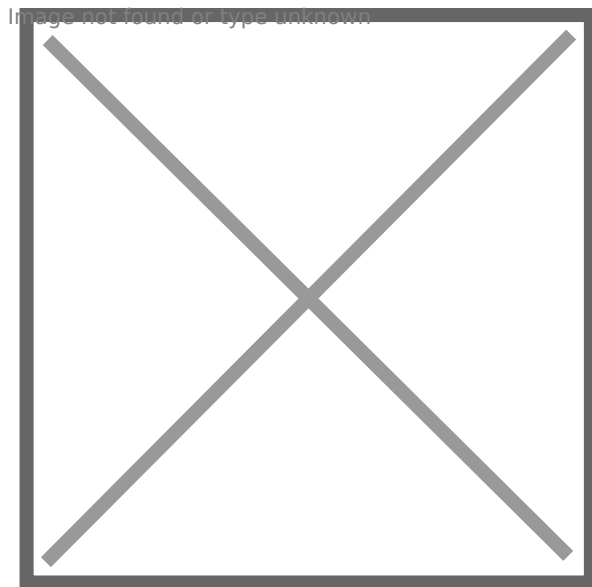


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A very efficient guy, 3 dice the first time, then 2 forever after. At 2 dice he's an insane rate.

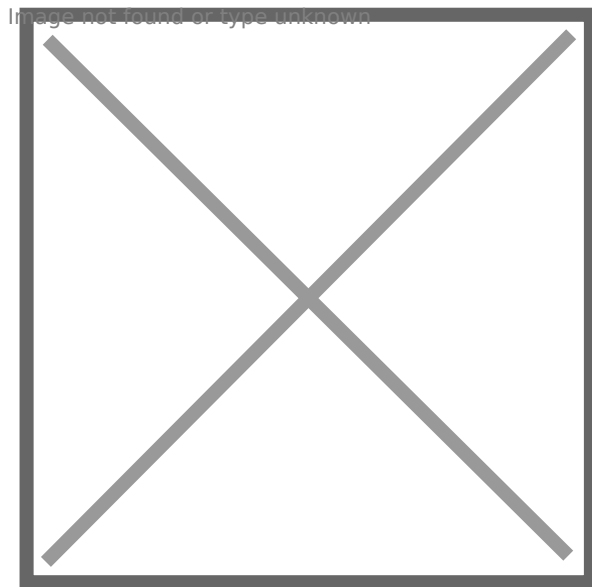


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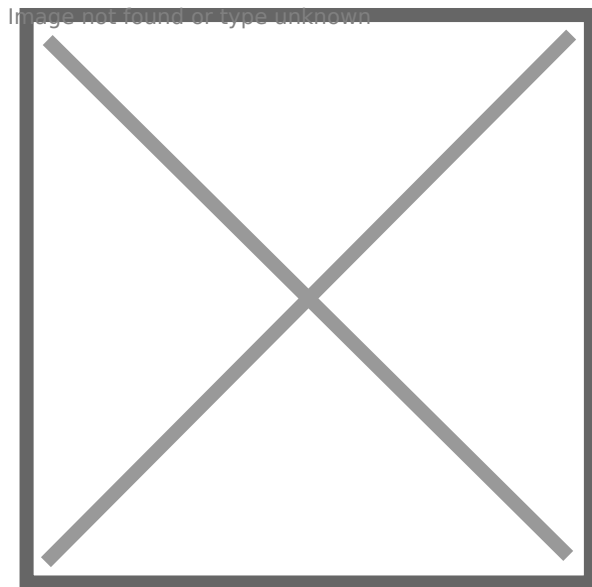


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Maybe this is hubris because I don't know how many people are playing this besides myself, but recurrable 3/3 that plays Law of Domination has seemed very good to me. Less good against very wide, but still a lot of advantage for a book.

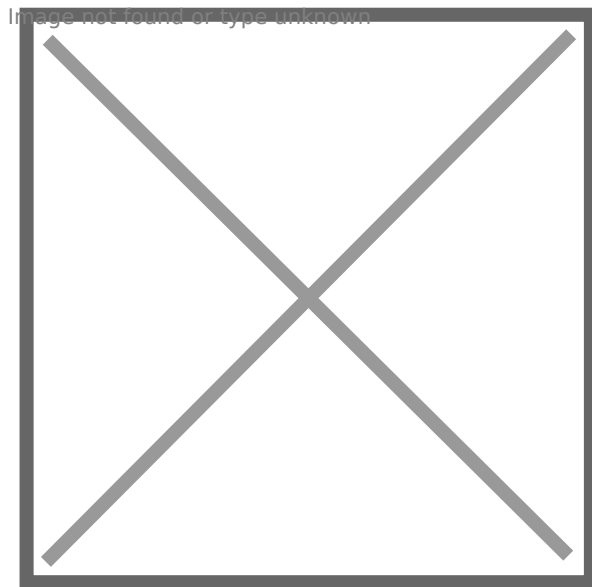


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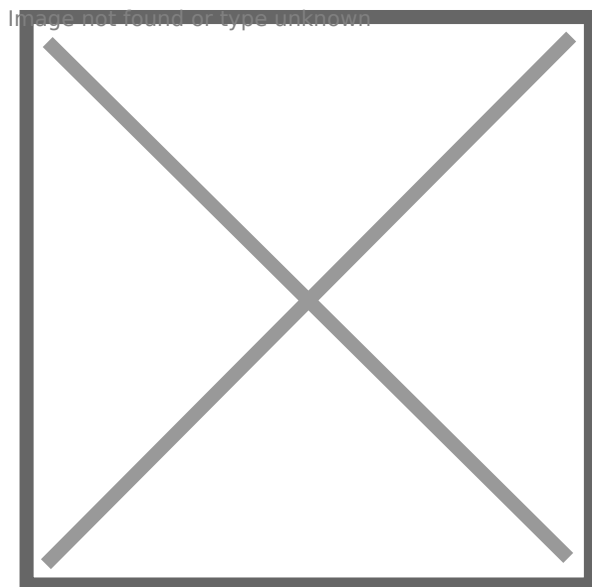


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I would write an entire article about my second favorite card in the game. 1/1s may seem little, but what if I make them by the bundle for 1 dice? Go ahead and read it if you haven't, it doesn't exhaust? IT DOESN'T EXHAUST.

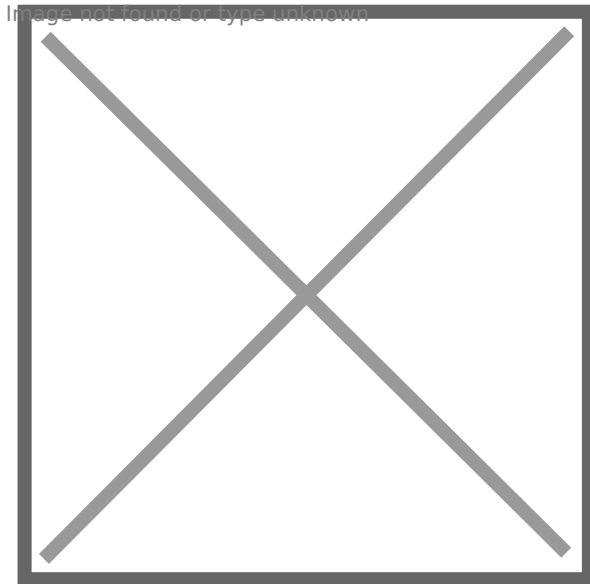


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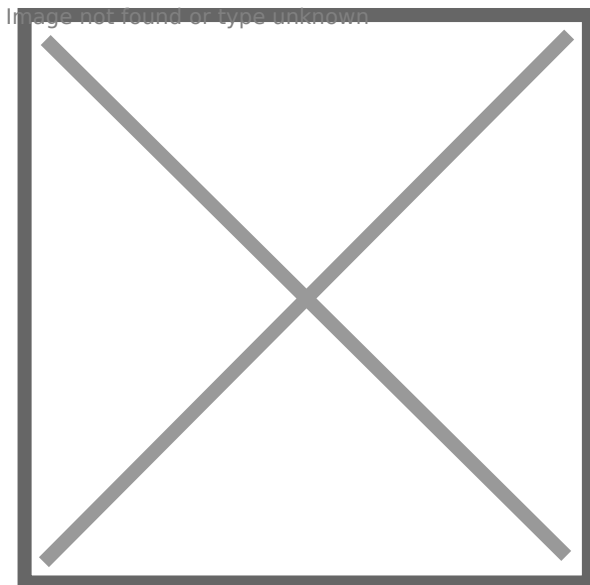


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This one is less universally good because of its dual color cost, but if you are in the market for a bunch of Archornauts, unit guards, or status counters he doesn't the trick on the cheap.

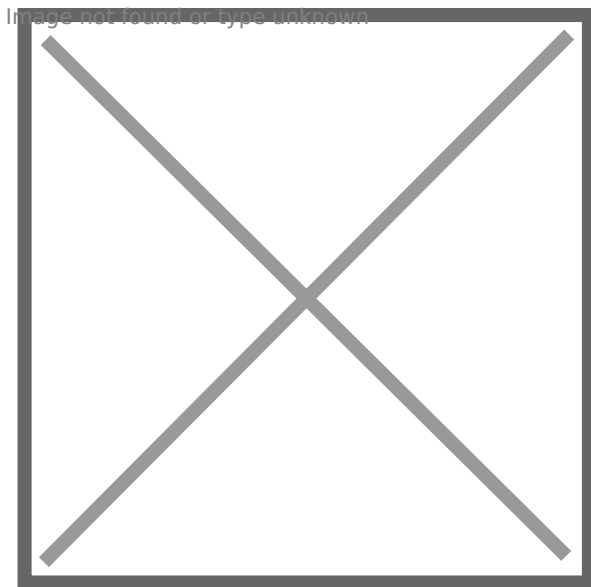
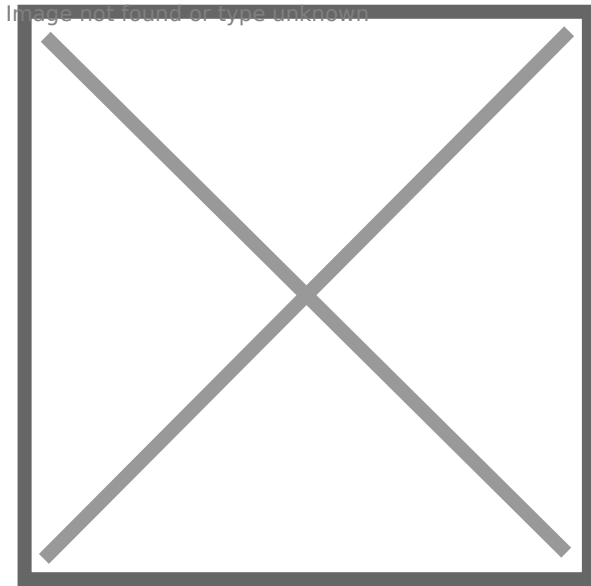


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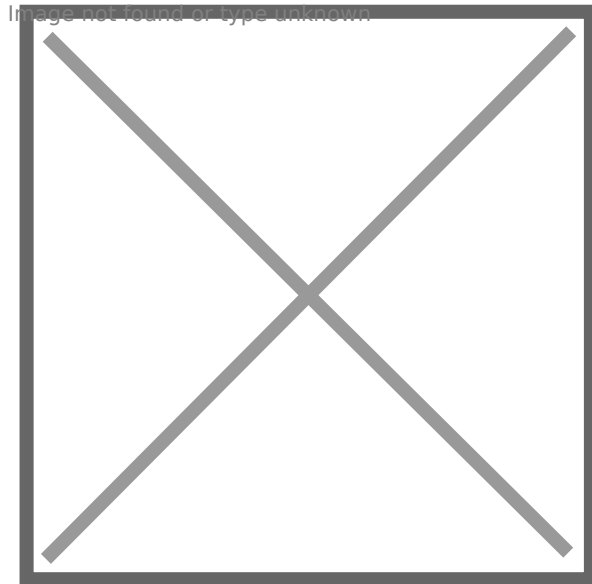


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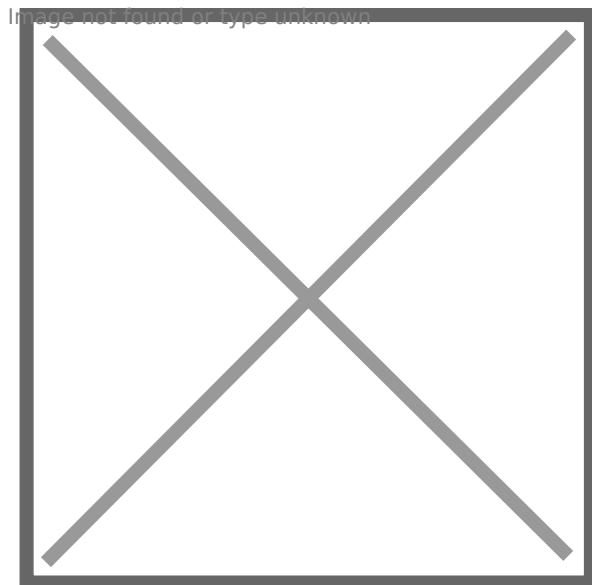
This is a weird one, it makes as much gas any 1/1 book makes but if you apply some gas it does some crazy things. Setting yourself up to where your opponent has awkward attacks generates some advantage. Setting yourself up where your opponent has no good attacks generates a ton of advantage. That set up requires work, but it's worth it.



Another strange one. Most players, myself included will overlook this at first. But it becomes apparent very quickly that if they dont kill it, it becomes a 2X-for-1. That's a lot of math in your favor. Most times they will kill it, but it probably cost them more than the 1 dice you made your owl with so you are still winning on the exchange.

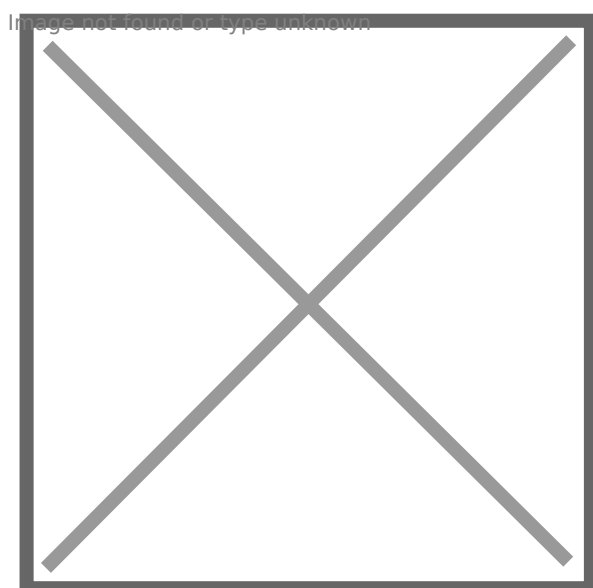


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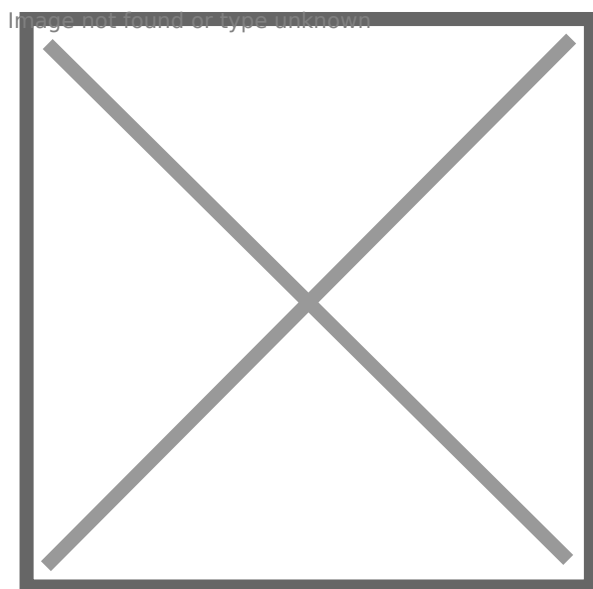


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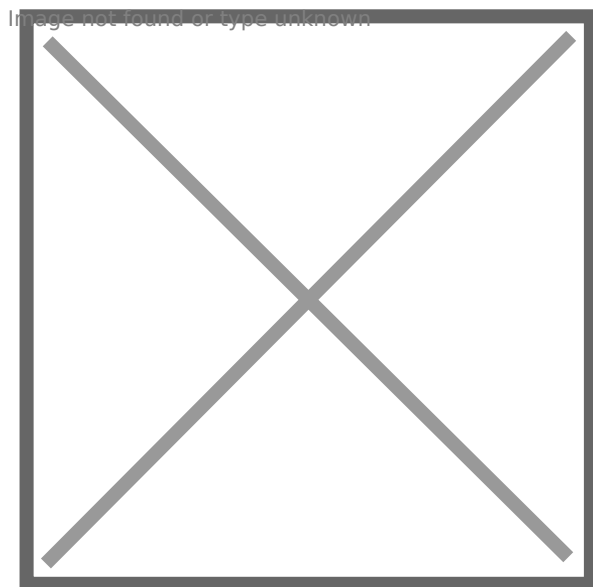
Another personal love of mine. Stalk is close to the best ability on units and you get a 2 dice 2/2 with stalk.



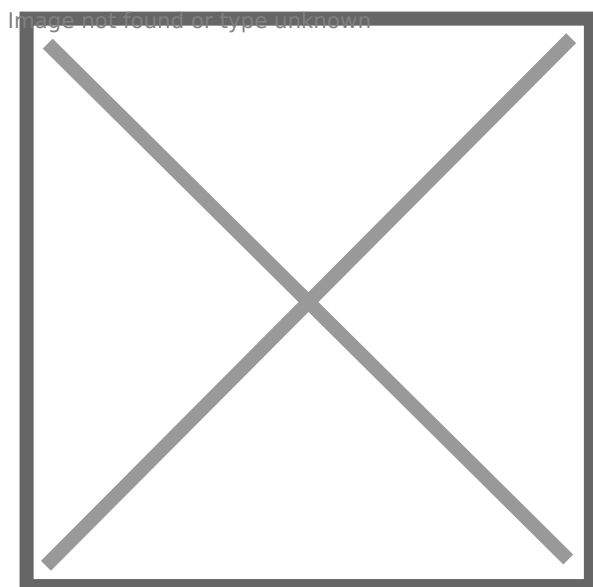
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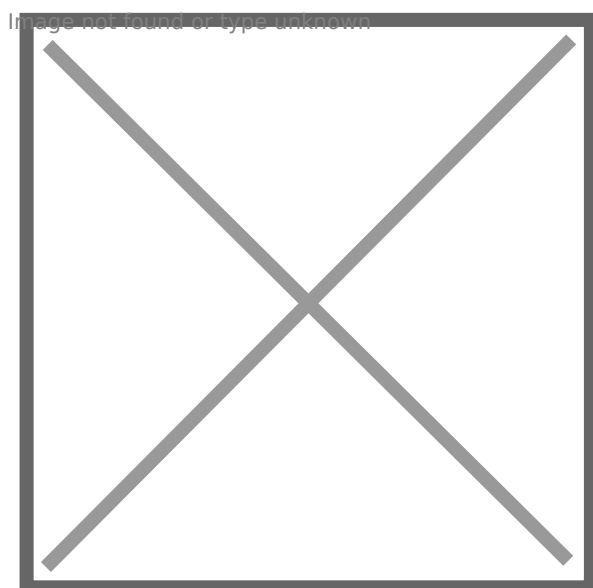
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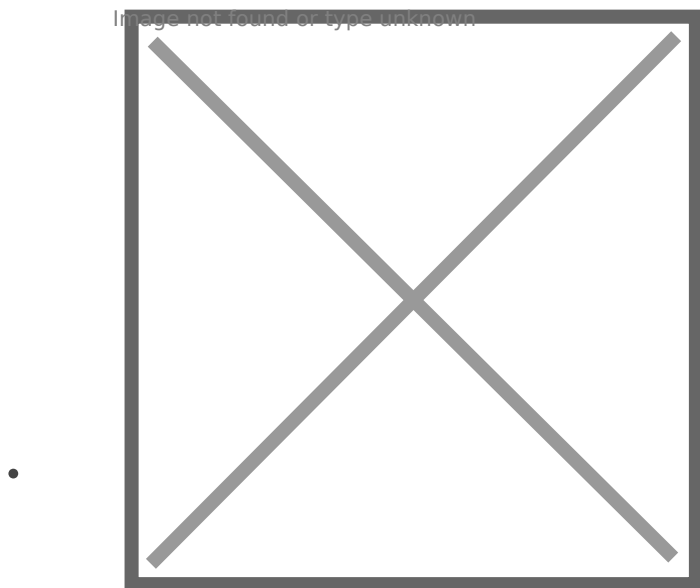
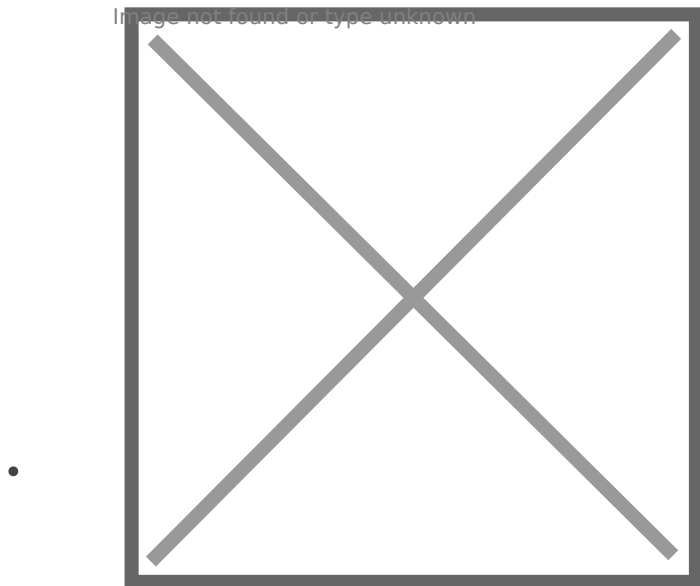


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These I pretty much consider to be the same, good in go wide category that want very cheap book activations to supplement their army. Monk having the additional benefit of laughing at your opponent's guilt link.

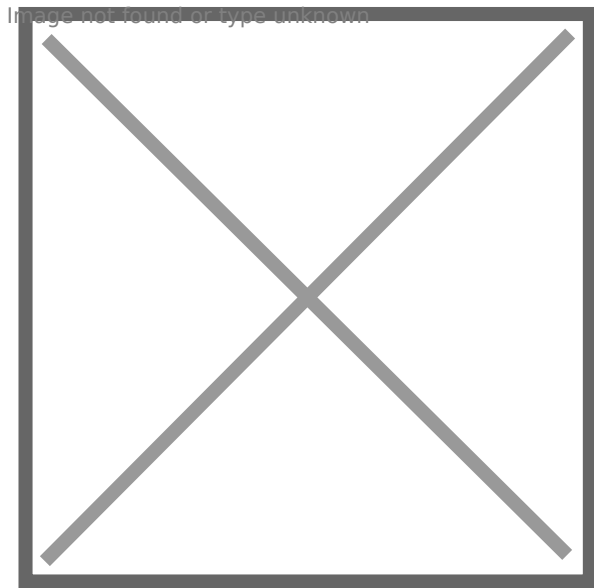


I put this one on the list simply because I saw it absolutely work my fellow bus driver Jesse in one of his matches on the stream. It is an expensive rate for a 2/1, but when it's good, it's hard to beat.

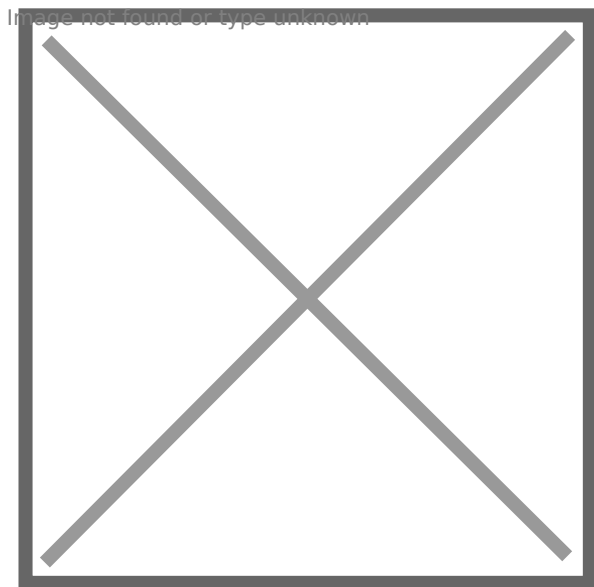
Top Tier Ready Spells

Books obviously aren't the only ready spells in the game and similarly they pretty much all make gas. You will see a variety of them at any level of play but there aren't very many that will change

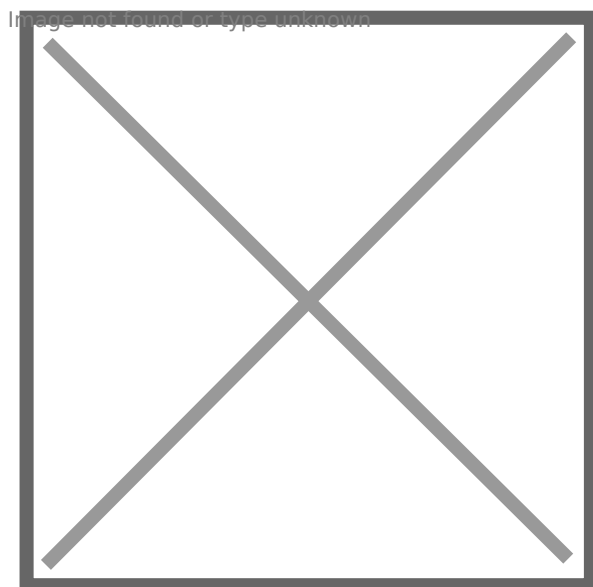
play patterns in a meaningful way. They are mostly utility activations. Some common ones are dice fixers (magic syphon, changing winds, stc.), some are small draw engines (augury, chant of worship, etc.) and some are small pingers (frostbite, small sacrifice, stc.) Some unique ones to watch out for are:



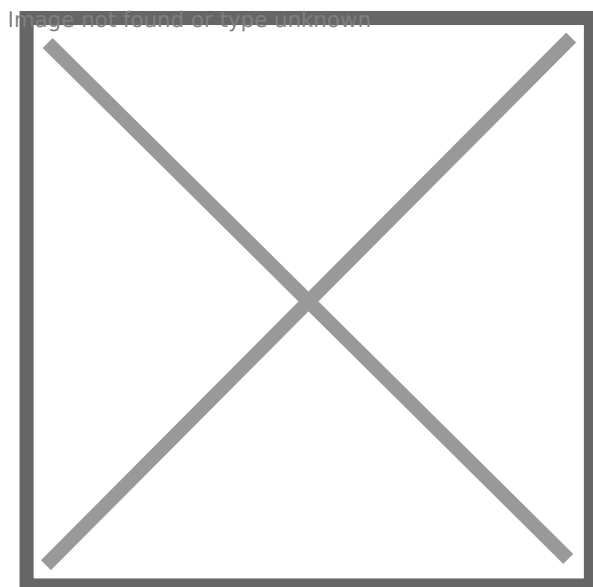
A major problem card for decks that function mostly with only 1 real threat at a time, but it's easily answered if you see it coming. See Salander Monk above.



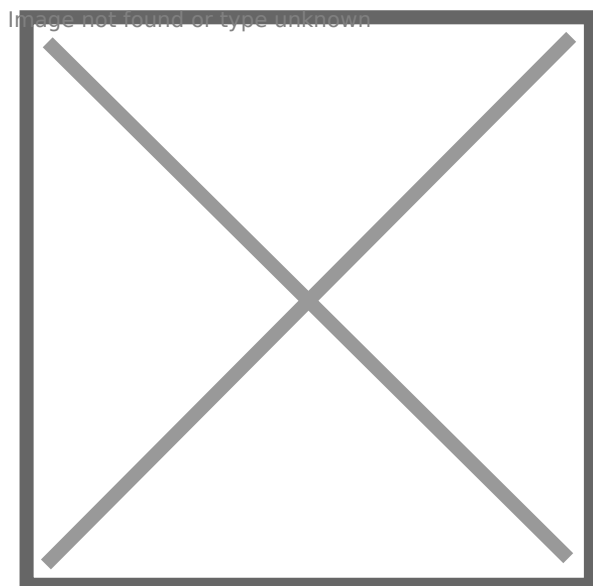
I should probably put this with the action spells because most of what it does is just once, but it is a good removal spell. Play around it like Guilt Link, especially if they have an Emperor Lion book.



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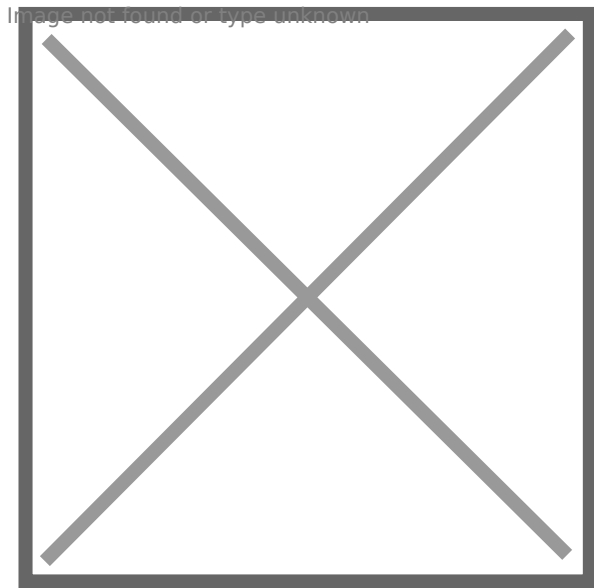


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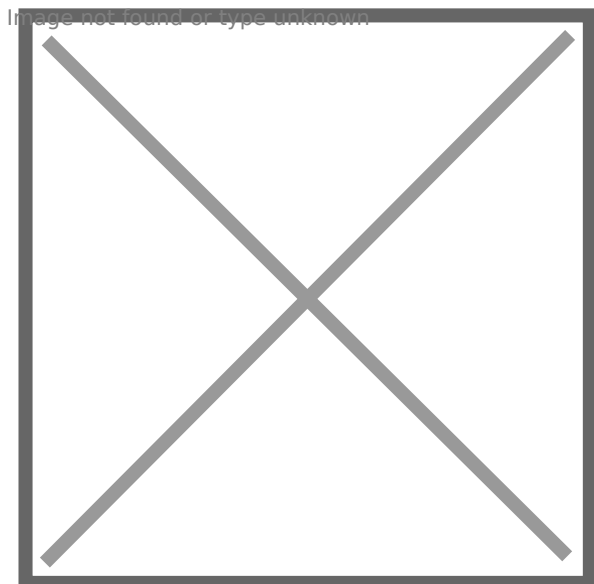


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Other Laws – If these are good against you and your opponent plays them you are in trouble, luckily they are very narrow so it's hard to stick one very good. Just keep them in mind if they wreck you and your opponent has Divine dice and/or has an Emperor Lion book.



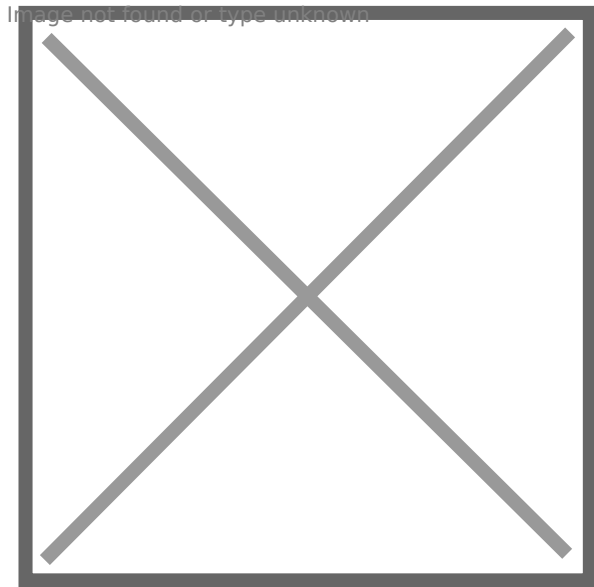
This looks symmetrical, but it is not. If your opponent is playing this card they are going to make better use out of this 90% of the time. There's not a lot you can do about that outside of trying to keep your deck total high so as to not get decked. But if you see this early, expect your opponent to be trying to win in a different way.



If your opponent has a Dark Presence they are going to try to cheat you out when you can't block. It's on board so you should see it coming, but it's definitely a way to lose if you get caught by it.

Top Tier Action Spells

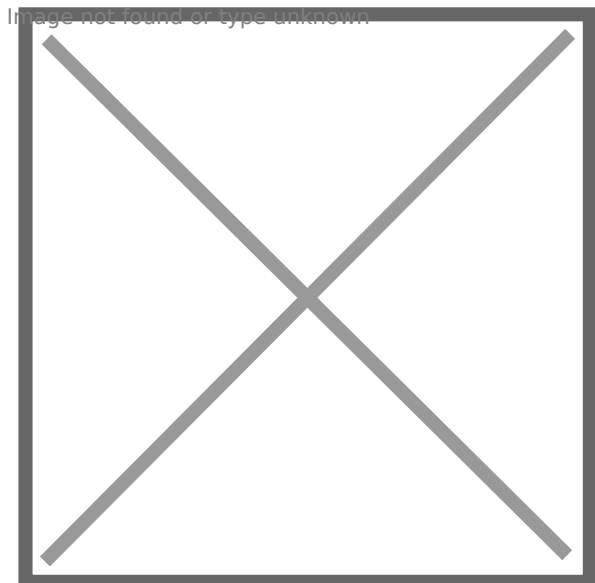
The ready spells really put a lot of pressure on the single use cards in the game to be very good in order to compete. I'm going to be glossing over essentially all action spells as I think they all be categorized into removal spells, card advantage, and unexhausts. Removal spells are kill spells for units (fester, to shadows, etc.). Card advantage spells put new cards in your hand (expand energy, new ideas, etc.). And the rest unexhaust your units to use again (adrenaline rush, refresh, etc.)



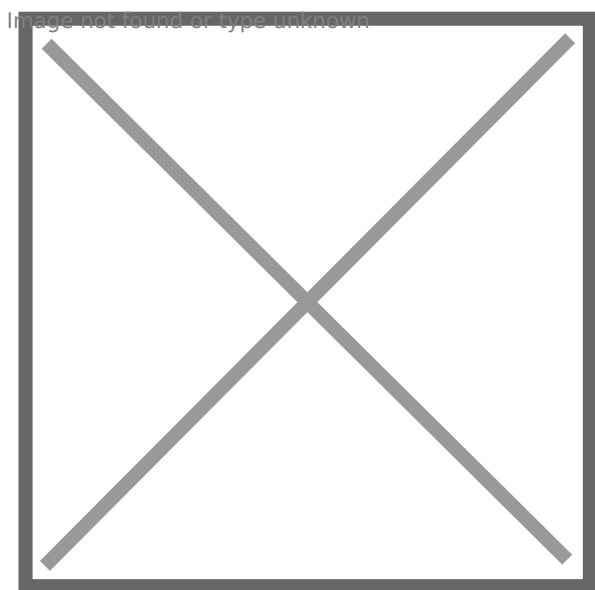
The only action you really need to play around is Molten Gold, so try not to go to 3 if you can avoid it when your opponent has multiple nature dice.

Top Tier Reaction Spells

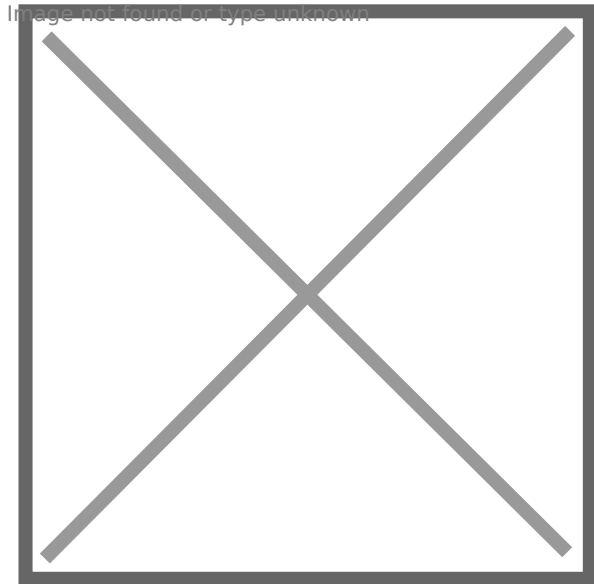
The reaction spells are the ones you really need to play around. Some are easy and telegraphed, some are not. Luckily on your turn you can see exactly what dice faces your opponent has and plan accordingly. It's a good idea to just know all the reactions, but these are the ones I think are the most impactful.



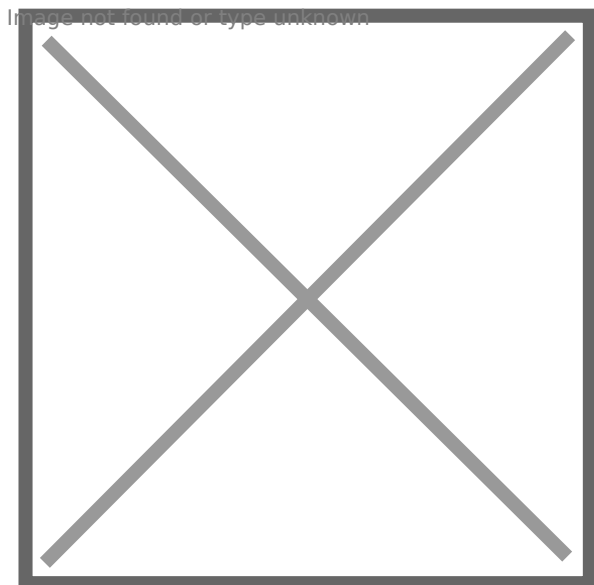
If your opponent is showing charm power, be wary of your removal spells. There are very few times you break even with dice when you get Veiled and you definitely are losing in tempo when you spend and action and they don't.



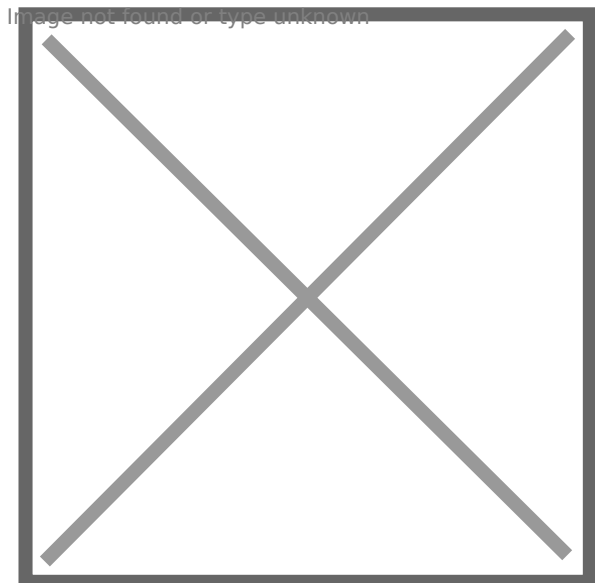
This one is more difficult to play around because sometimes you have to kill a guy or the opponent will kill their own guy just to play it. If you suspect widows, just try to make them spend their ceremonial dice before you use your kill spells if possible.



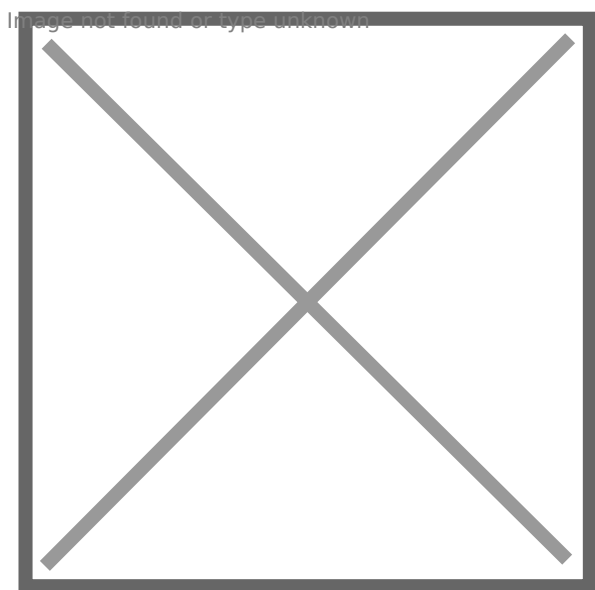
This one is also hard for the same reasons as widows with the additional defense of trying to keep your life total high. It can't kill you unless you're at 2.



This one is interesting because you have a lot of control on when your opponent can play it. It doesn't feel good to not attack with your guys, but if you are at 2, then you should wait until you can possibly get in for lethal so they die before they can pain you.



If you have a 2 health unit it's almost impossible to not get trapped. Just try to play your little guy when they aren't showing nature. It's not as bad as most reactions because it is easy to break even on dice as most 2 health units are cheap and if you get your book trapped you are plus 1 card.

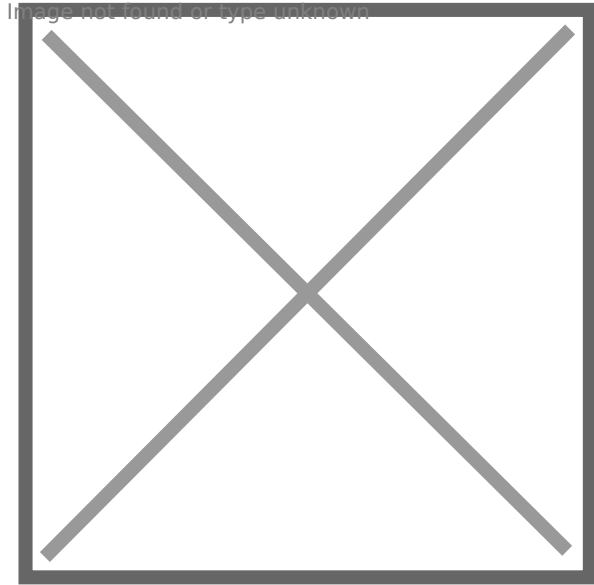


The moral of this story is that sometimes it's ok to Skald for too much. I have been blown out by this a couple times, so go for the over kill if you suspect shield.

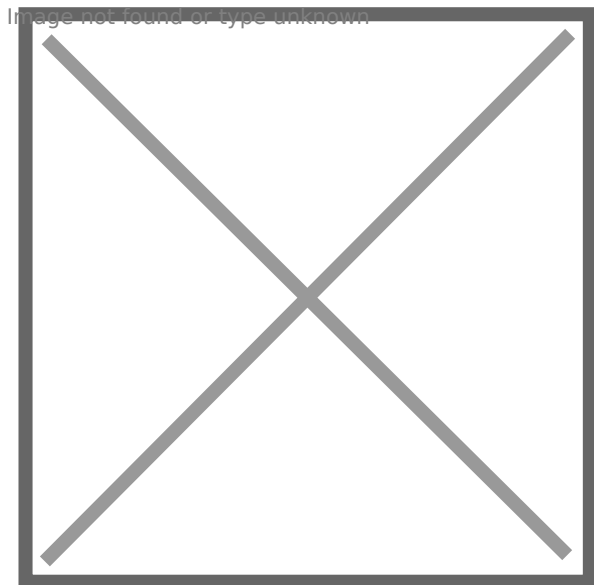
Top Tier Alterations

I am also going to gloss over alterations. In general I hate unit enchantments, just a good way for you to get 2-for-1'd and make a big dice deficit for yourself when your opponent plays a removal

spell. There are 2 that are worth mentioning.



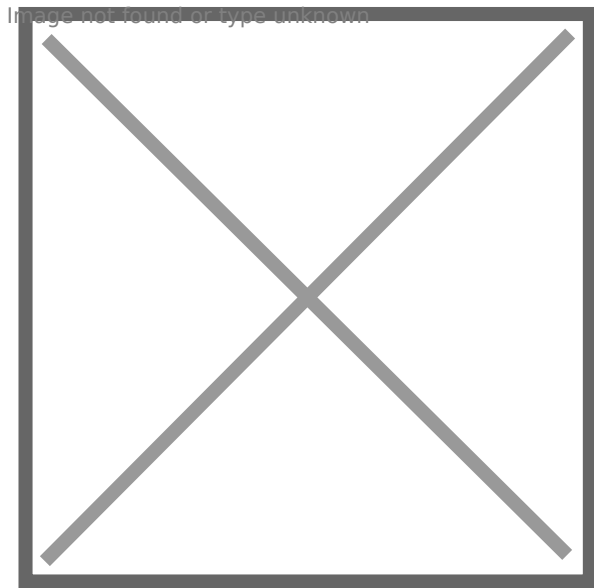
This is restricted because it's cheesy, not because it's good. Just respect it if you have seen one in your opponent's pile from meditate or something because it can cheese you.



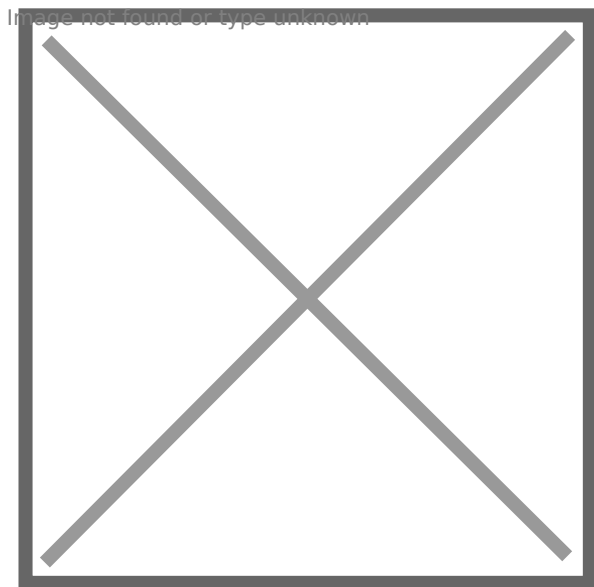
This is more on the list because it's one that I would play. Because this is a removal spell, it should probably be listed above.

Top Tier Allies

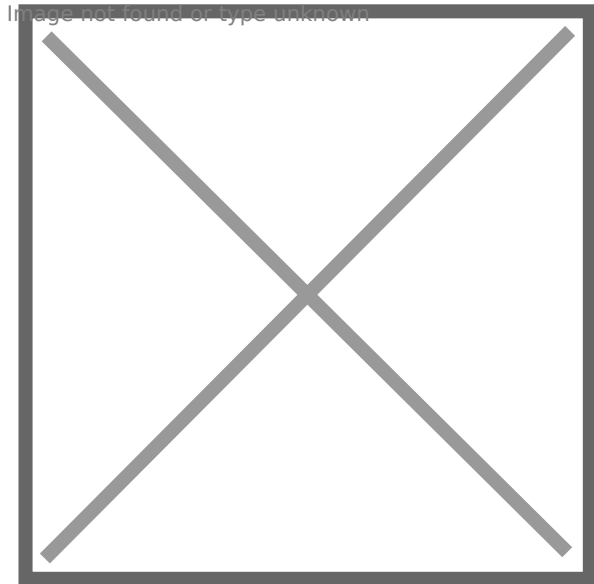
Finally the meat and potatoes of the Ashes cards, the allies. There are a ton of allies, and many of them are playable and very real threats. For the most part they are better than summons of the same dice cost because they are one shots barring outside effects. But generally, they all kill you by attacking.



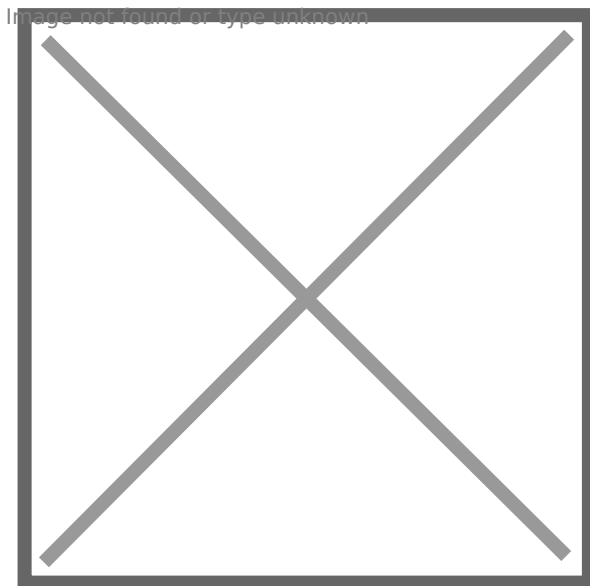
Here's my contradiction, Anchornaut does not attack you. He is a utility guy. As cheap as they come, a small removal tool, and a body to use for blocks or sacrifice effects.



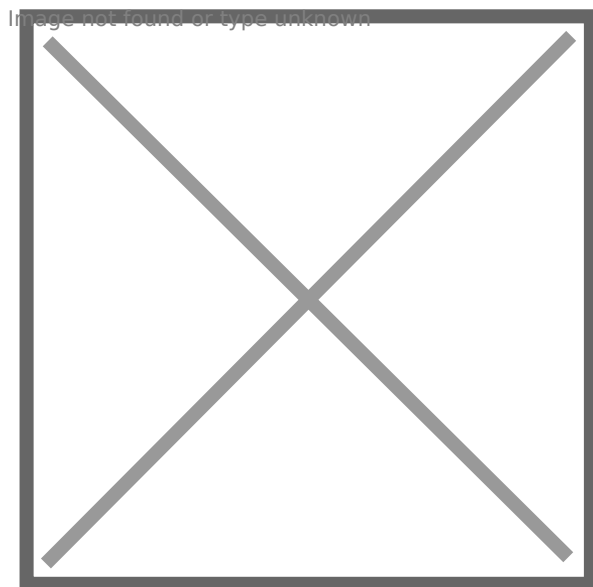
I have lost an embarrassing number of times to the tune of Ceremonial dice power into Fire Archer for the last point of damage. This is similar to Anchornaught as a utility body for blocks and sacrifice effects and it attacks for 1 sometimes too.



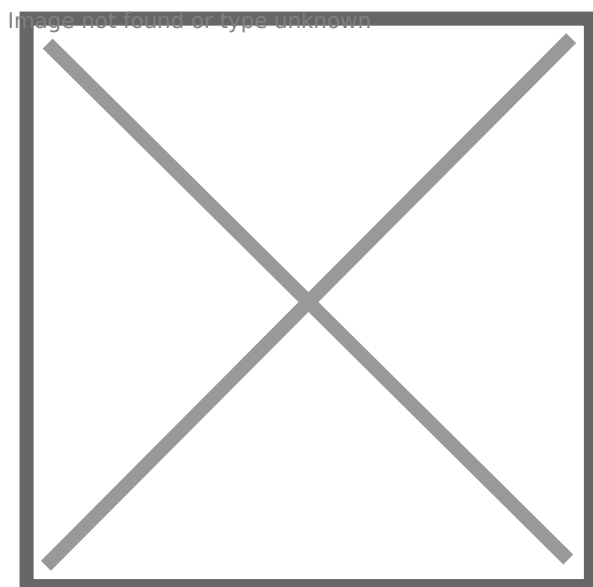
Another utility body. Just puts your opponent in a can't attack can't kill it situation some of the time, and the rest of the time you don't feel bad about a 2/1 for 1 dice. High ceiling reasonable floor on this guy.



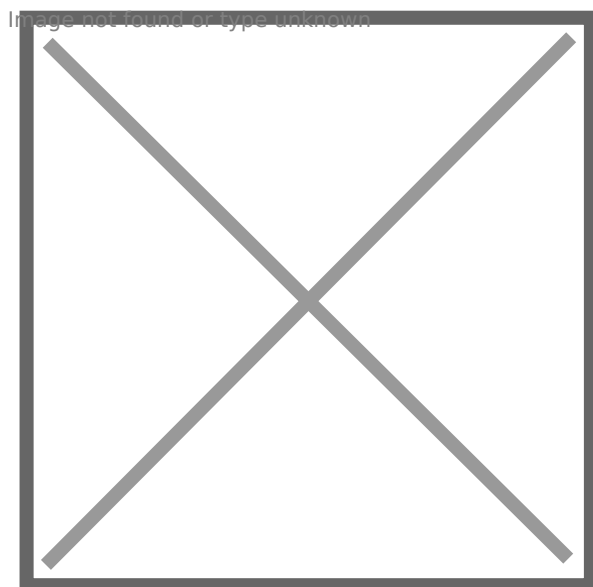
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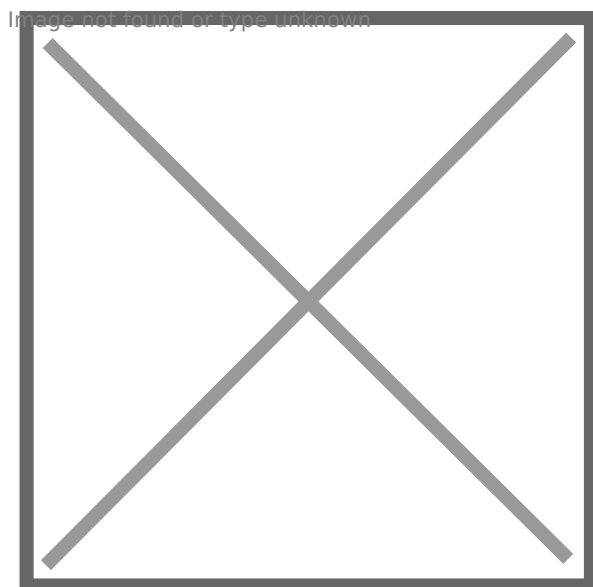
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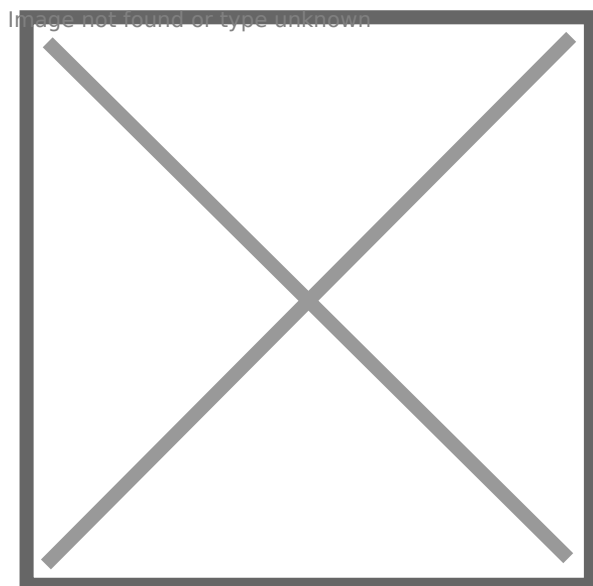
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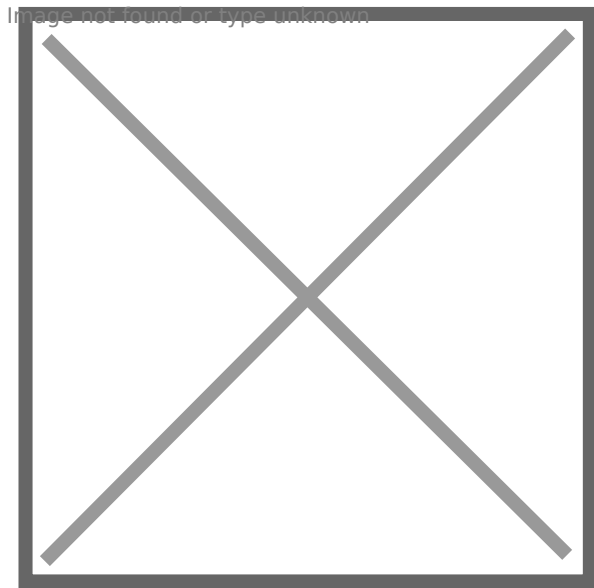


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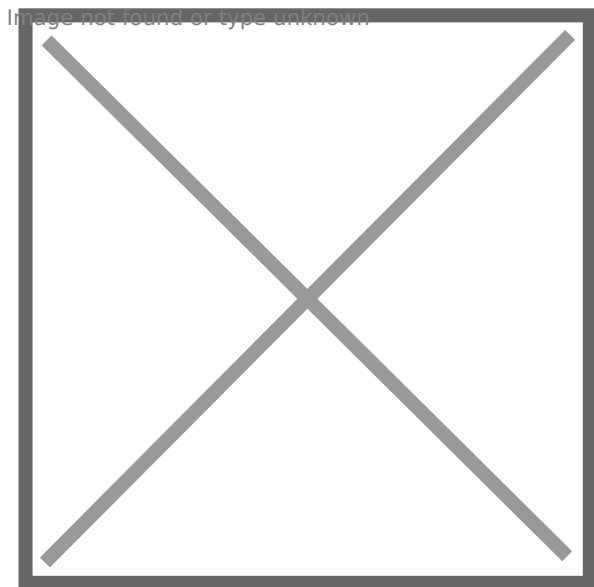


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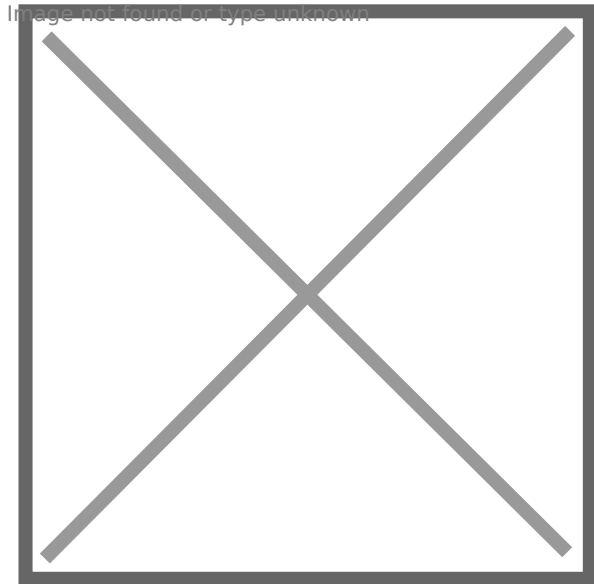
The bread and butter of midrange decks. All very efficient allies to fight your opponent and their units. Feel good about playing 1 when you draw it, don't feel bad when you don't. Just very solid threats, so play them if they are in your colors.



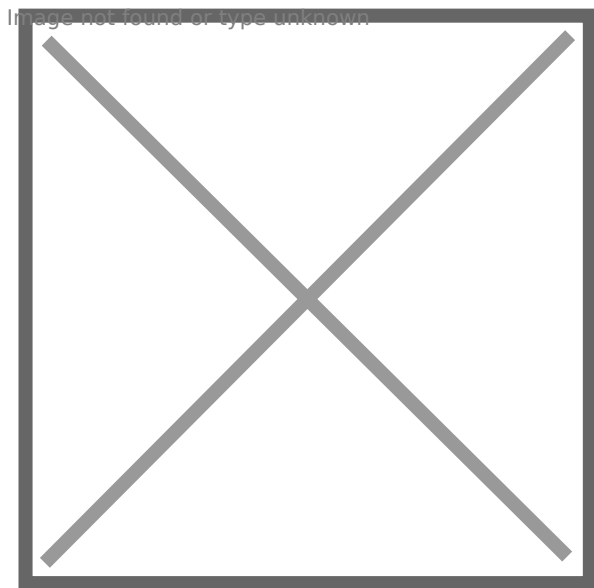
This card almost made it on the list above because I think it's a similar value. I rank this one slightly above them because you always have the play of 3/2 do a damage. This card adds a ton of gas if it lives one turn.



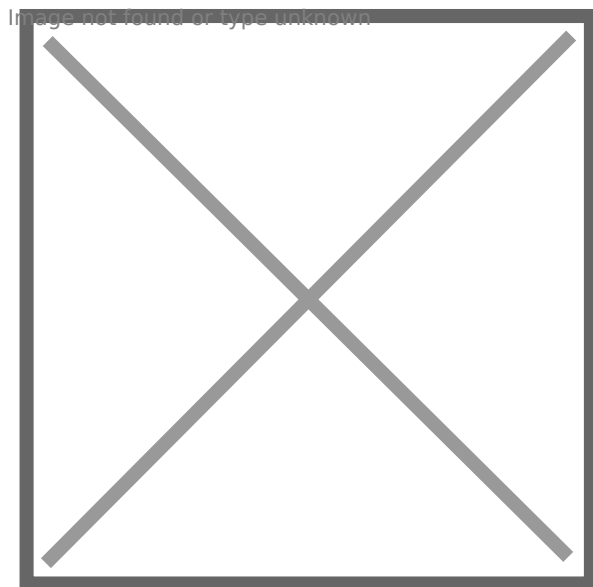
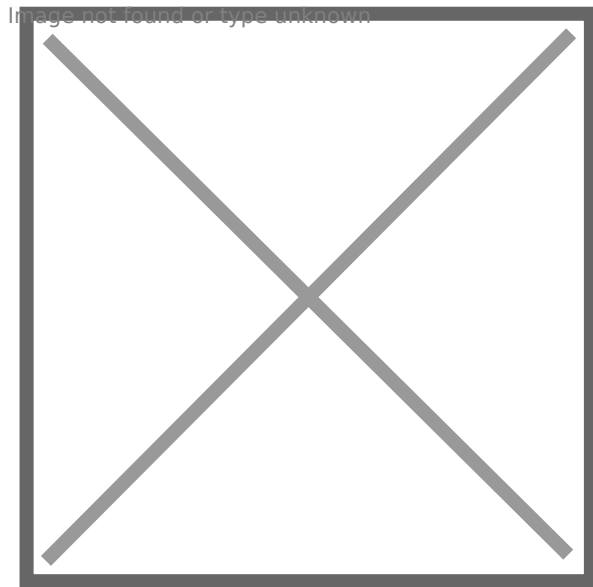
This is an expensive 1 damage the first time, but they have to remove it because the 2nd activation makes it totally worth it. So you have 2 modes: 1 damage and they discard a card or attack or you get 1 damage then 1 damage next turn plus a card or attack.



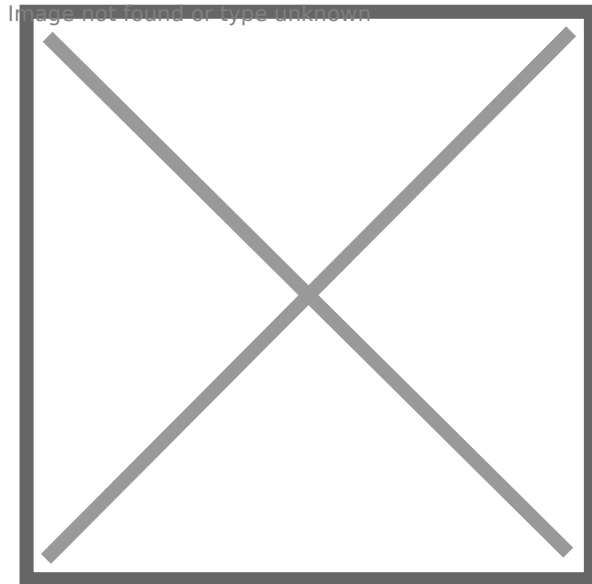
I love this card. It is both cheap and the closest thing we have to resource denial.



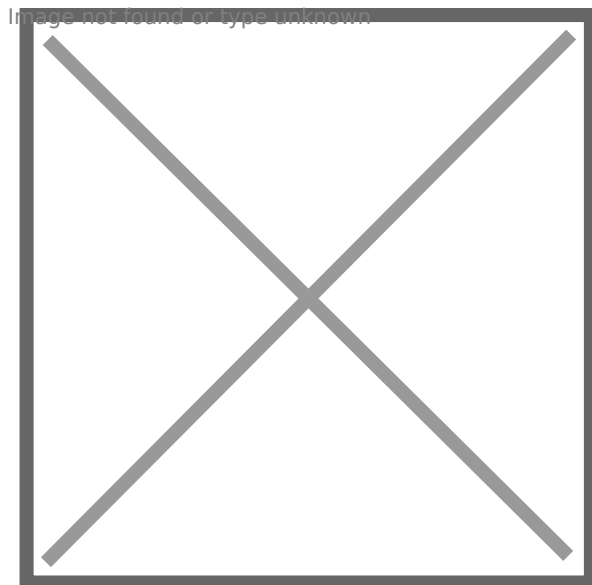
This guy rocks, I am a big fan of all units that come into play as a side action so they can attack on the same turn. And Light Swordsman attacks and doesn't take damage back. It's almost like a removal spell for 2 health units.



I hate this card, it is on the list because everyone loves it. It is an efficient man with another man attached. Obviously good in some situations, also ignorable sometimes. If you are a wide aggro deck this is one of the best guys. Also good if you have a multitude of sacrifice effects or mounts.

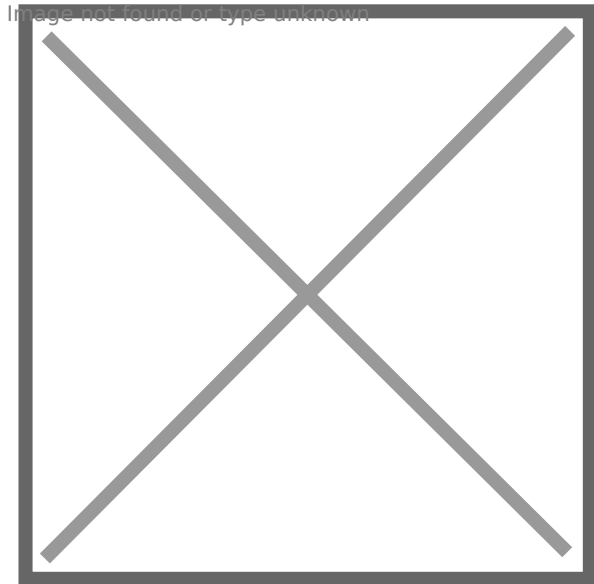


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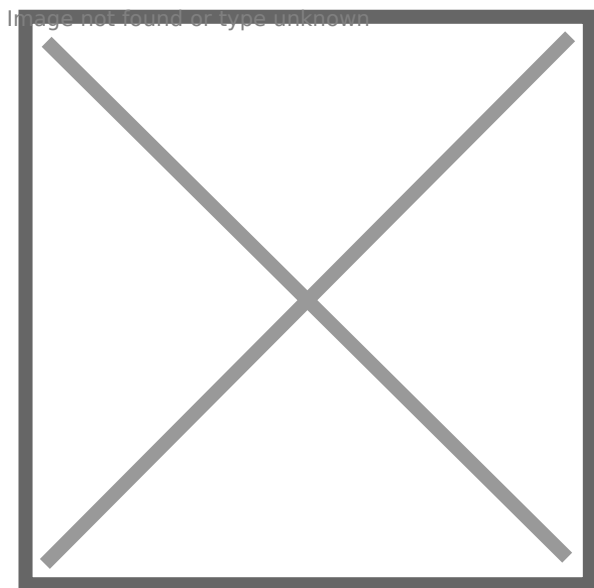


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Flash Archer Is bad. Skald is good, this card will see play. Thank you Skald for making me relevant!



This is like a combo of a utility unit and a knight. It's costed like a knight and fights good with everything like a knight but also draws you a good card when you play it. This enables a lot of focused nonsense on top of being a great guy. Remember not to attack into it with small while it's not exhausted.



This is a very average guy and maybe should be in the reaction section. The reason I mention him is just to add him to the play-around-me when applicable list. He can really screw up an attack.

This is like half of the total number of allies in the pool. And many of the remaining ones are playable and even good. But mostly I think they are redundant to the ones above. But you should not feel bad about playing a Beast Tamer, Immortal Commander, Stormwind Sniper, etc.

Conclusion

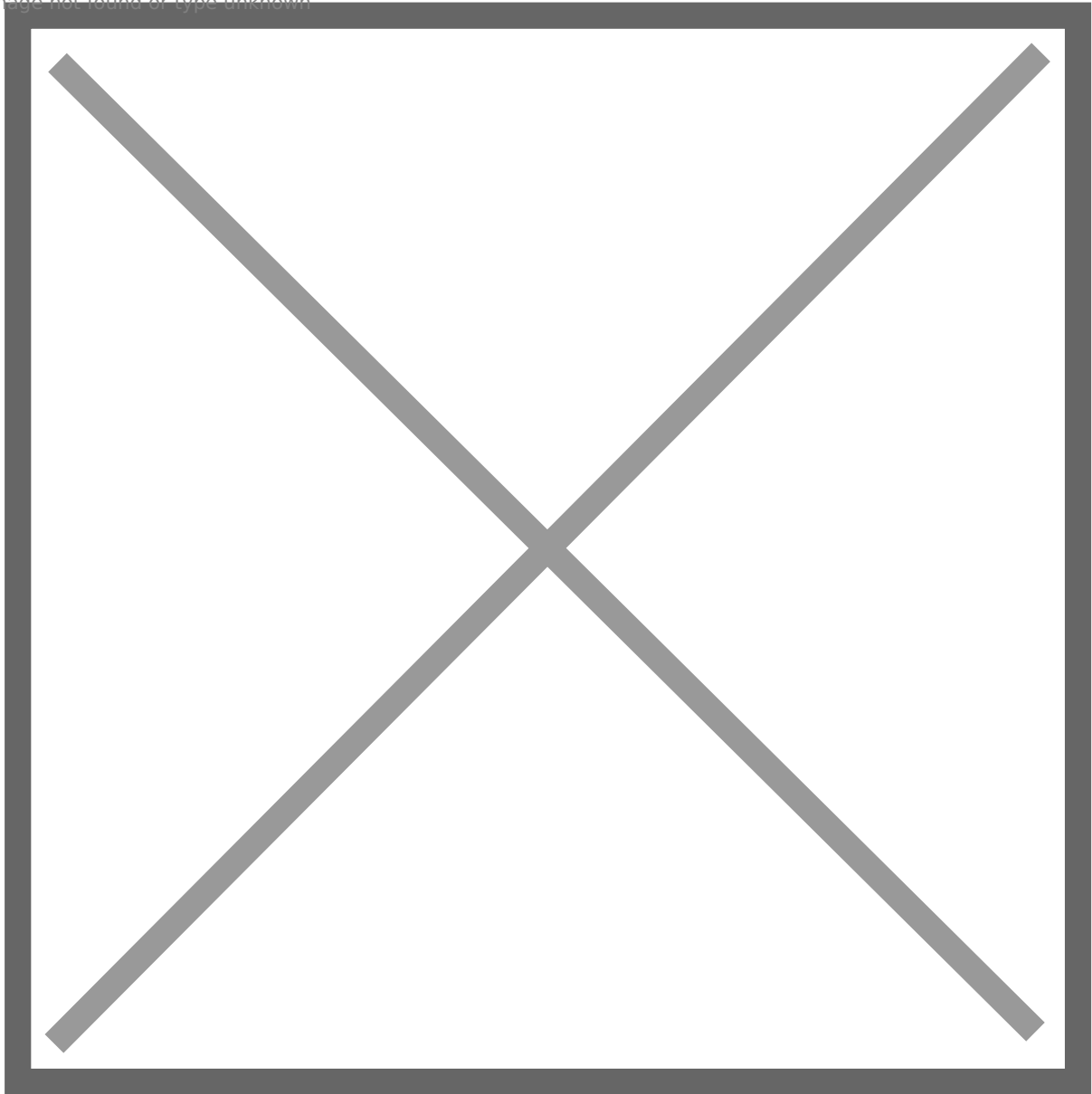
Overall, I love playing Ashes: Reborn. If you are interested feel free to @ me with comments, compliments, complaints, whatever. I hope this primer helps you get started in the world of competitive Ashes Reborn. Please check out and support the community discord, community made content, our current online tournaments, the Ashteki crew, and especially Plaid Hat Games. Get off my bus.

Ashes Reborn – Fiona's Wraiths Deck List

Originally published at <https://theshufflebus.com/ashes-reborn-fionas-wraiths-deck-list/> by **ShuffleBusJesse**; archived Jan. 9, 2023.

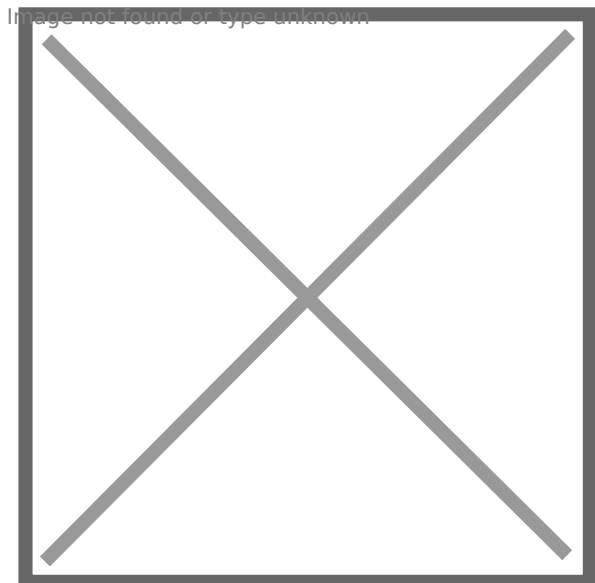
Fiona's Wraiths

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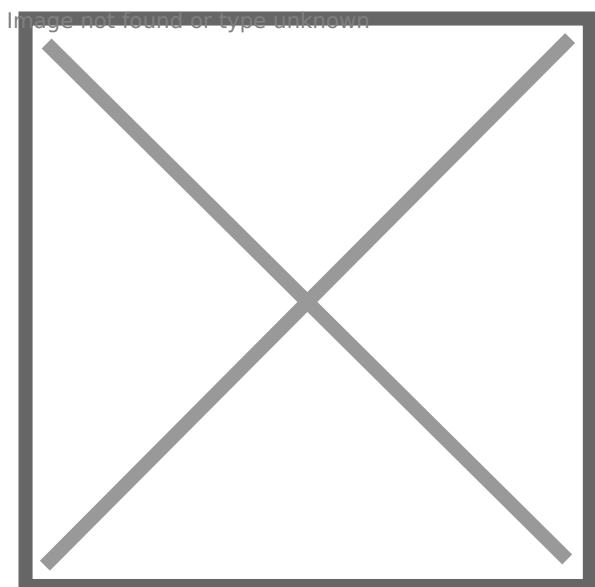
Hey everyone! Jesse here back with a new deck tech. The Fiona's Wraiths decklist is a combo that could potentially win you the game as early as round 2. Usually, I prefer to do deck techs over video. But with so much content hitting our [Youtube](#) page, I wanted to find an outlet for decks that may not hit on all competitive levels but offer a gratifying play experience. Today's deck is exactly that. You can also directly look at the deck on [Ashes.Live](#).

Keys of the Deck



The decklist's name provides us with a critical hint on what we are trying to accomplish. Fiona is the Pheonixborn of choice for this deck. Her *Ingenuity* ability is unique, and I do think that it could be potentially competitive. Fiona has the issue of a low health value at 15. With a Battlefield of 6 and a Spellboard of 5, she has plenty of options to put out there. Spellboard of 5 seems to indicate the use of a lot of summon books. I believe this strategy was viable in Ashes 1.0. In Reborn powerful allies have left their mark on the meta. Fiona has been left on the outside looking in during Reborn. Nonetheless, some unique synergies exist with Fiona and her ability to reuse any ready spell each round.

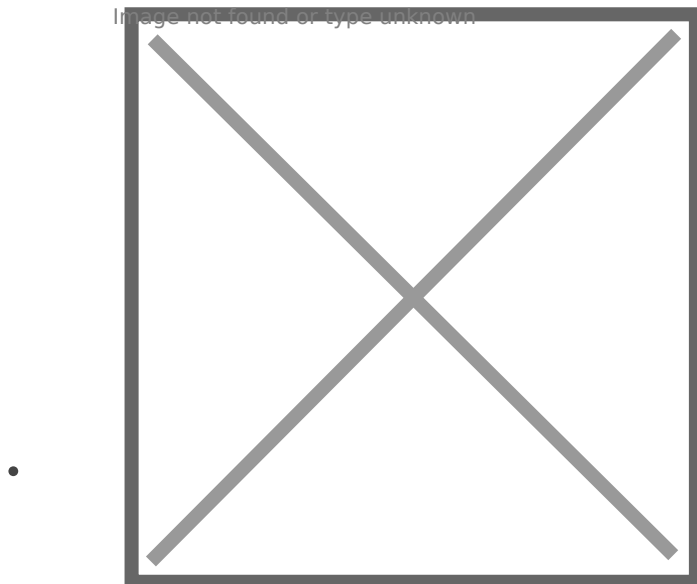
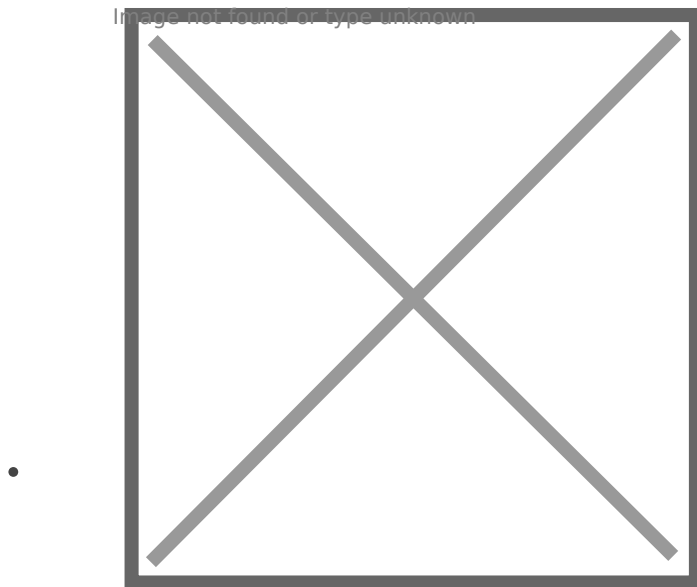
No Maze Today



Fiona's loyalty card Mind Maze is an excellent control card, but this deck is not about controlling your opponent. It's about leveraging Dread Wraiths. As such, we couldn't find a home for Mind

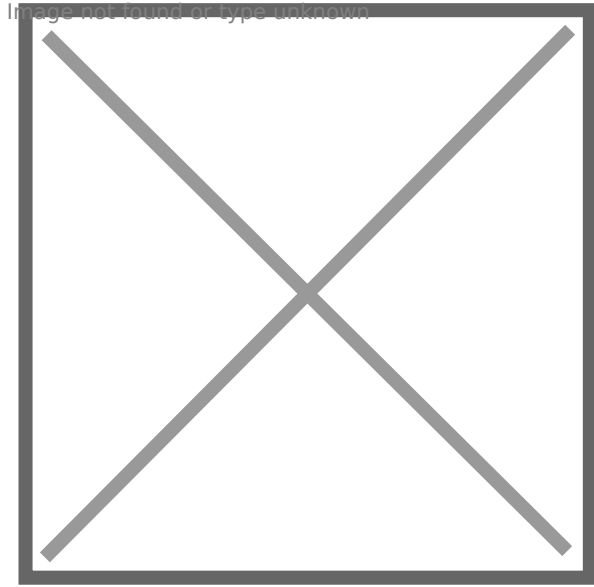
Maze in this deck. Summon Dreadwraith is an expensive three ceremonial class dice to summon. What do we get for this investment? A 1/6 body? Really? Why?

I'm Raging Bro



We are building this deck to leverage the **Rage 1** ability found on Dread Wraith. The deck is vulnerable to a couple of powerful meta cards. Sword of Virtue, Fester, Purify, To Shadows, and Fade Away will all make short work of your Dread Wraiths. Cards such as Riverskald and any direct damage kill spells have a much more difficult time against the Wraith. If your opponent is playing Harold, they can mark the Wraith and make six health more manageable.

Say it with me, Meteor.

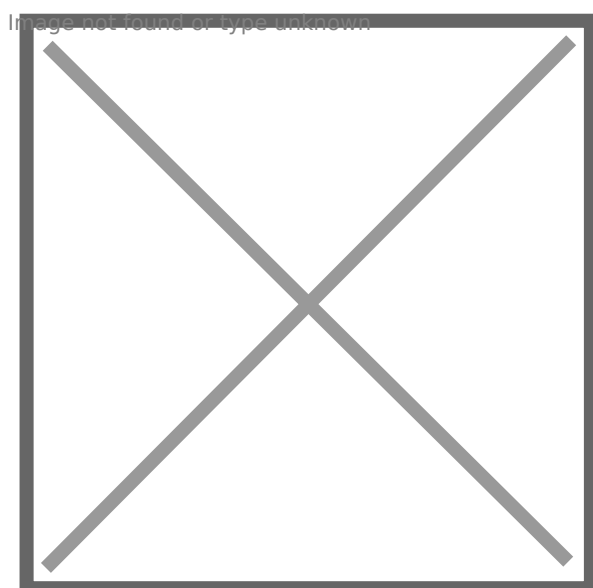


The first five Meteor plays are a staple of competitive play as they can reset the board. Both players can suffer the wrath (pun intended for your MTG fans) of the Meteor. With Dread Wraith, they have the potential to survive and get powered up. Powered-up Wraiths become a real threat to your opponent, and with Ingenuity, you will have two of them on the Battlefield post Meteor.

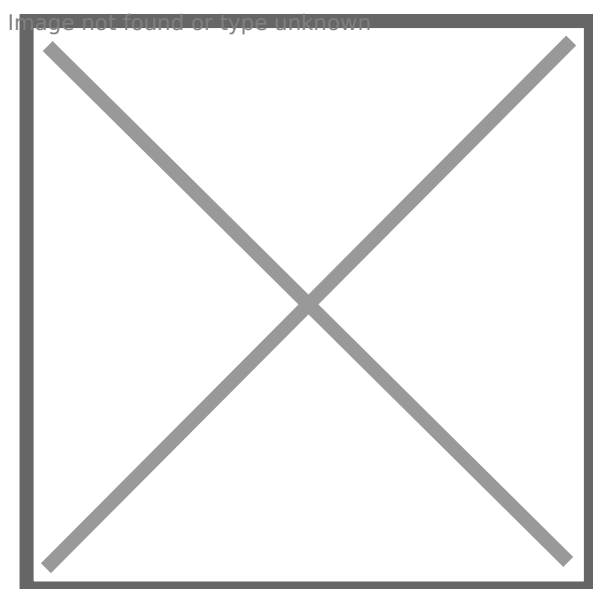
Don't go HAM!

Before you go out and take a bunch of turns with this deck, you have to know a few keys to beat your opponent. Here is the first five:

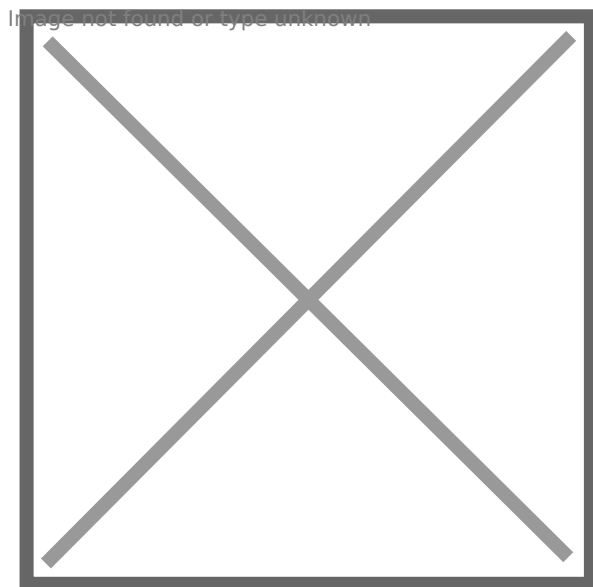
Summon Butterfly Monk, Fire Archer, Summon Dread Wraith, Frostbite, Meteor.



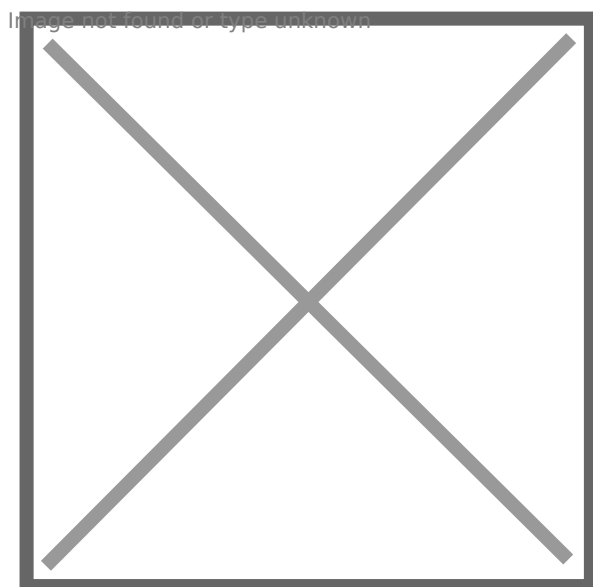
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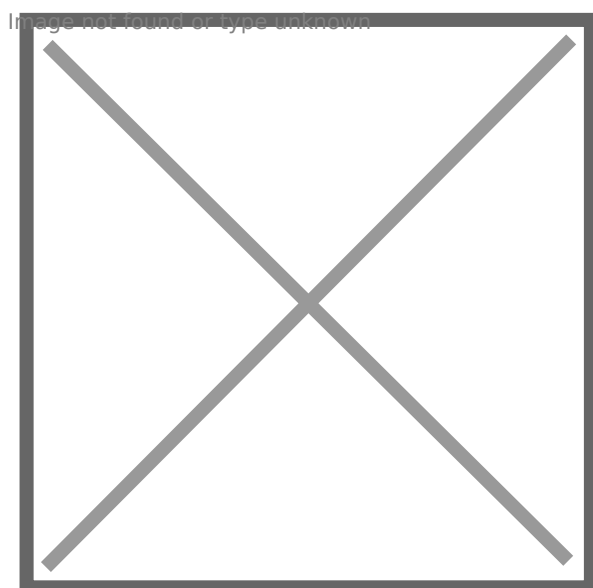
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First, it's essential to use your actions to maximum efficiency and essentially "slow" play your opponent. I'm not talking about you eating a ham sandwich while you play, but I'm talking about maximizing your main actions each round as much as possible through the supporting cast of your first five cards. The deck does not leave you with any flex spot in your first five, but we are on a very linear plan. Either your opponent can answer your setup, or they can't.

Second, you should plan to play your slower cards first. I typically play Frostbite, to Summon Butterfly Monk, to play the Monk, to Attack with the Monk. Because Butterfly Monk's **Mend 1** is inexhaustible, you will get to trigger its ability when you Meteor. Our 3rd card played is the Dread Wraith Summon.

Due to our conjuration count, savvy opponents will be worried that your last card is Summon Sleeping Widows. Because of this, do not telegraph your Meteor until as late as possible. You do need both of your divine dice to be on the Divine Power side eventually.

Here is where you have to figure out how many actions your opponent has left. You can use main action Frostbite on an opponent's PB or a pesky unit if you want, but I recommend the PB as your Meteor will clear most of your opponent's units. If they play a four health unit, I will use the Frostbite to put the unit in the range of Meteor.

The goal is to try and have your opponent out of cards in hand. Additionally, you want to try and have them unable to spend dice on their summon books. After you summon your first Dread Wraith, you will activate Fiona's ability as a side action and discard your Fire Archer. If successful, the Meteor will hopefully sweep away their entire board and leave you with two four attack dread wraiths. With only the Wraiths left, you should be able to push eight damage to their face.

Go First? Or Go Second?

To set up the opening sequence, the best way to ensure you get in front of your opponent's actions is to have them go first, plus it gives the added value of potentially swinging the top of round 2 with buffed Dread Wraiths for another eight damage. Combined with the potential of one damage from Frostbite in round one and you've done 17 damage to the opposing PB. 17 damage is a potential win-con against many PB's.

Don't be afraid to use Fiona's Health.

Fiona's health pool is one resource in your eventual victory. If your opponent tries to commit attacks to one of your Wraith's, make sure Fiona is setup to tank the hardest hit. The Wraith can take up to two damage and still live through your super-powered Meteor play.

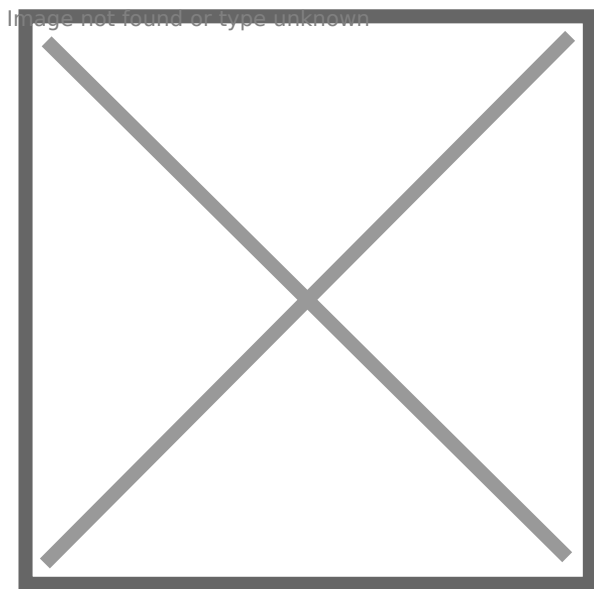
Aggressively Meditate

In the first turn of the game, you should aggressively meditate from the top of your deck to set up the whole turn, minus showing the Meteor play. Make sure you get your ceremonial on the right sides, and power sides are perfect for this. The power sides on the dice bluff several plays, and since your opponent hasn't seen the Wraith yet, they are left guessing. The two divine dice that went unmeditated will have them tend to believe you are on Winged Lioness or some other plan with Divine.

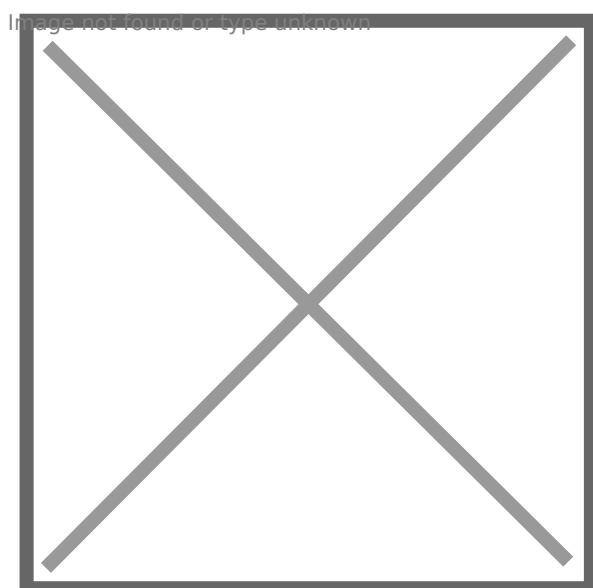
The Rest of the Deck

There are a variety of decks that make it hard for the Wraiths to do mighty things. Before you play Wraith's book, identifying whether the combo will work allows you to pivot even before you Meteor. The remaining cards are supported to help you close the game out. You will find many of these cards in our [competitive primer](#).

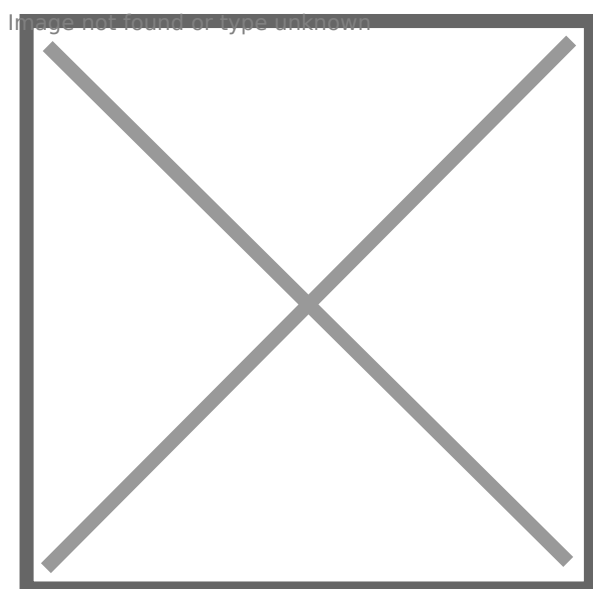
Summon Sleeping Widows are a tremendous explosive play for reaction to a Butterfly Monk or even a Wraith in Round 2+. Ideally, you can play the spiders after your opponent is out of side actions, making them impossible to be pinged away by natural magic. Don't be afraid to trade one Monk for One spider, though.



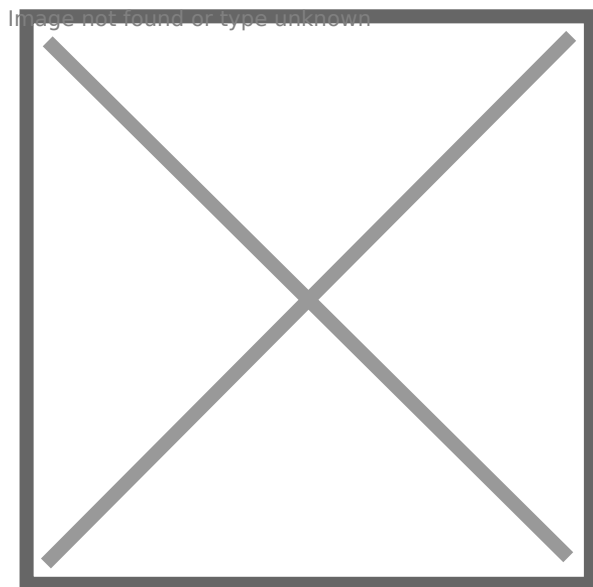
Usually, in Round 2, a Wraith will die, and it's an opportunity only to need to spend three dice to get a new Wraith on board and keep up the pressure. Risen Horde is more card advantage.



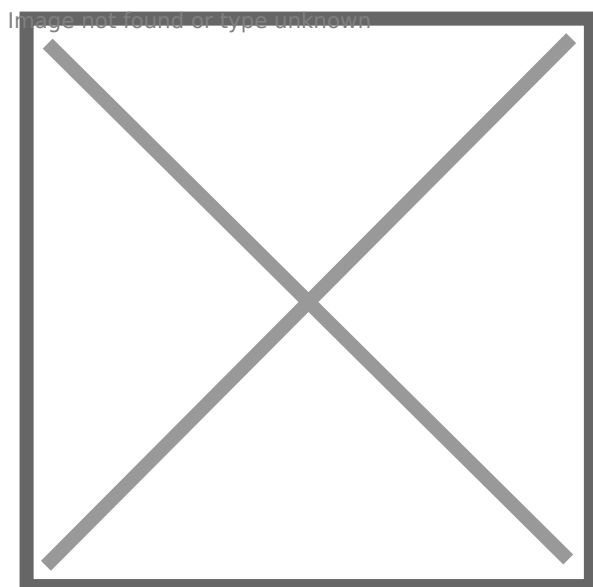
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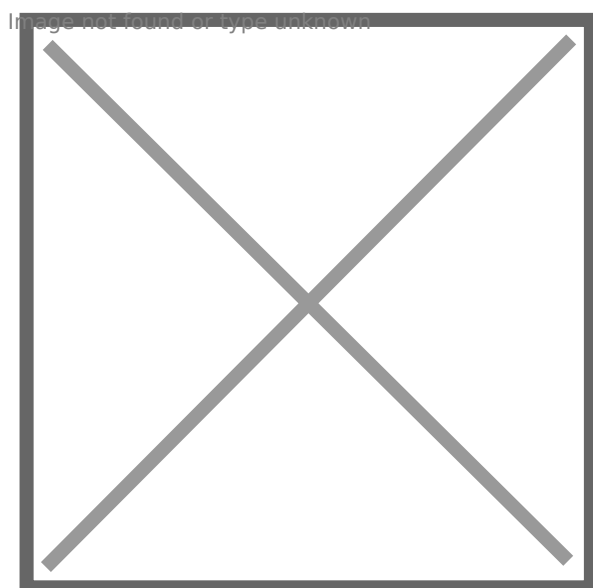
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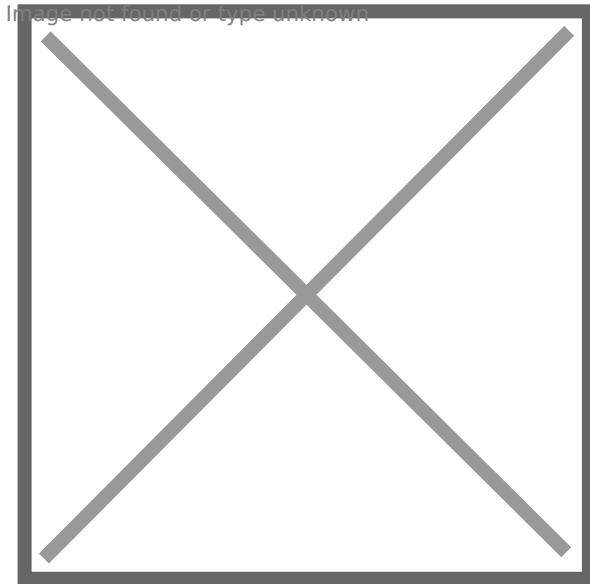
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Adrenaline Rush is a great Action Spell to use as a side action on an exhausted Wraith to pump it up and get a surprise attack on an unsuspecting unit or Pheonixborn. Sometimes Wraiths can only attack for one, and an opponent will counter to damage the Wraith. Adrenaline Rush provides that Wraith with the ability to stand up after an attack as well. Finally, Wraith's one-point attacks can turn on your Fester, but usually, Frostbite will be your ideal play for Fester or just a Natural Ping.

The deck has three Final Cry and three Molten Gold for closing out games. These spells give us 15 direct damage, which is more than enough if we can land a few buffed Wraith hits. There is a singular ice trap in the deck for pesky low health units like Raptor Herder outside Round 1. Finally, we have 3 Fire Archers, one in the bin, which means if you get down to needing to make a single point of damage to win, you can use Ceremonial power into Archer for victory. Choke is for more damage on PB's, and sometimes it can blow out opponents, and it can be considered for your first five if you are up against Harold.

Hard 30 – Beyond the First Five part I

Originally published at <https://theshufflebus.com/hard-30-beyond-the-first-five-part-i/> by **Jerod Leupold**; archived Jan. 9, 2023.

Flat Argiaia'er Theory

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 most 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 present 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 the 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 fewer 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! Let's chat in [Discord!](#)

Example 1: I have a deck 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 fewer 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 of 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 play 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 card with a couple of two

costs thrown in for the rounds you don't draw Essence Druid. The deck is pretty much chosen for your 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 of 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 the 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.

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!

About the Author

Jerod Leupold has been an avid gamer and advocate for over 30 years. He cut his teeth on the business side by founding and running Critical Hit Games in Iowa City for eight years before selling to excellent stewards. Now that he has time to take things like vacations he amuses himself by using his English degree and journalism background talking about game theory. He has been published under the Gamenomicon franchise for Party First RPG adventures and sourcebooks. As well as several articles about A Game of Thrones CCG and LCG back in the day. While he's never hoisted a grand champion trophy he has been an innovator and bride's maid an innumerable number of times.

Or, How I Learned to Love the Three-Eyed Owl

Originally published at <https://theshufflebus.com/or-how-i-learned-to-love-the-three-eyed-owl/> by **Jerod Leupold**; archived Jan. 9, 2023.

Or, How I Learned to Love the Owl

Hard 30 - Meta-tations

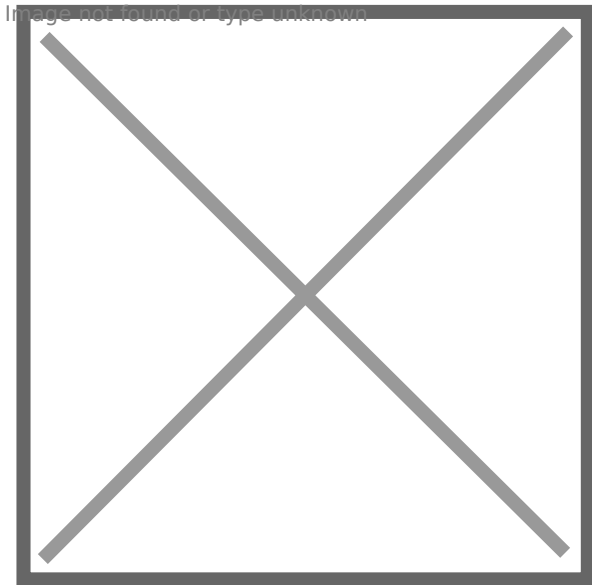
Three Eyed Owl is the bane to all players. These feathery conjurations disrupt a first-five, accelerate fatigue late game, and are a general nuisance in between. Players must have a built in plan on how to handle 3EO or face the wrath of a clunky start that spirals into a dismal loss.

Why is Owl so bad for you?

Turn one is more important in Ashes than any other game because players choose their starting hand. This is where all players spend a ton of time constructing just the right balance of battlefield, burn, or mill in a tight ten-die package. If just one of those cards gets pitched by a lousy one-cost conjuration your plans can follow suit.

Think of cards in hand and your dice as resources. On turn one, just based on scarcity, cards in hand are more valuable than dice. If you only start with five cards and one gets taken away from you on your first turn, then that's bad. Unless you have a way to recur it, you are down 20% of your cards which can be a huge advantage to your opponent. And if it's not, why were you starting that

junk card anyway?



Good Solutions, Bad Solutions

Expending more than one die and/or one card to counteract an owl play feels bad. Because it is. You have to consider that your opponent has only spent one card and one die to get the owl into play. You don't want to expend any more than that to make an equitable trade. In other words, if you spend three dice or two cards you were much better off just discarding a card.

S Tier Solutions

Built-in abilities that don't cost a card are the best. Odette is the number one owl hunter in the game. Period. End of Sentence. Aradel almost feels quaint having to spend a die to use her ability compared to Odette but these two Pheonixborn make up the best solutions to the pink menace.

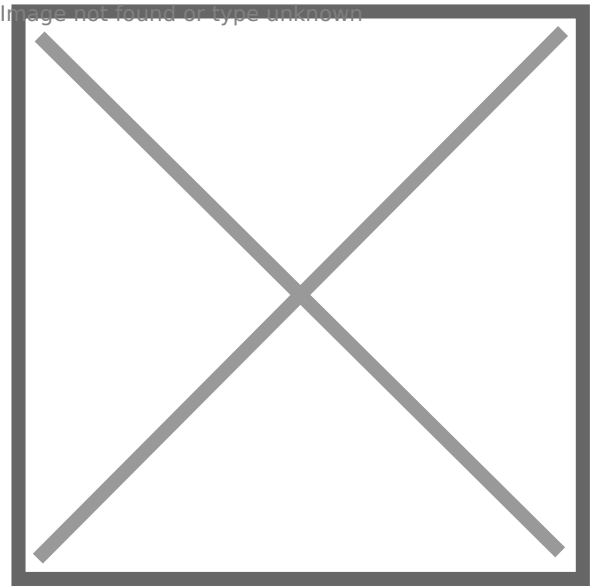
Noah is particularly good here, too. For one die shut down owl, as a side action mind you, on turn one. After turn one, you can wheel his ability towards more dangerous books. I will put Body Inversion into this category too, it matches owl efficiency and is quite good against other targets as well. What ultimately puts it into this lofty realm is it can be repeated every turn.

Odette Phoenixborn
Aradel Phoenixborn
Noah Phoenixborn
Body Inversion Ready Spell

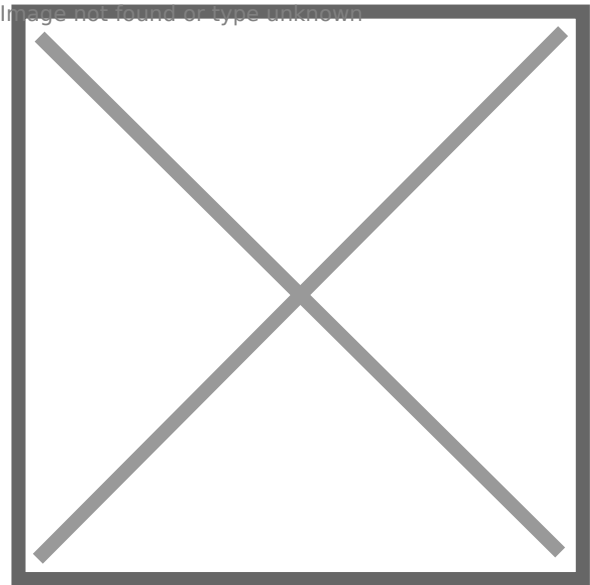
Good Tier Solutions

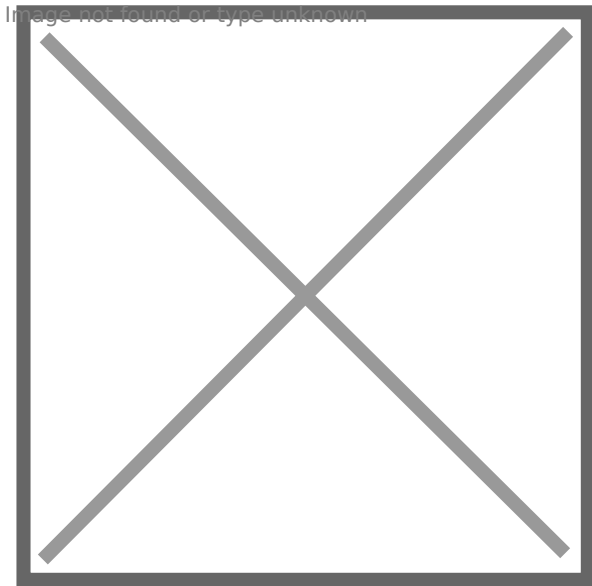
This group encompasses anything that doesn't cost two dice without further ability. And there are a ton including; more removal options, exhaustion, and outright avoiding the problem.

Removal Options



Law of Domination Ready Spell





Chained Creations is often overlooked as a good choice because it costs two. I think it's great AND if you run a little damage in your deck it can knock off bears for an extended period later on too. Owls normally get left on an island at the beginning of a game. So a well-timed Law of Domination can do the trick most times too.

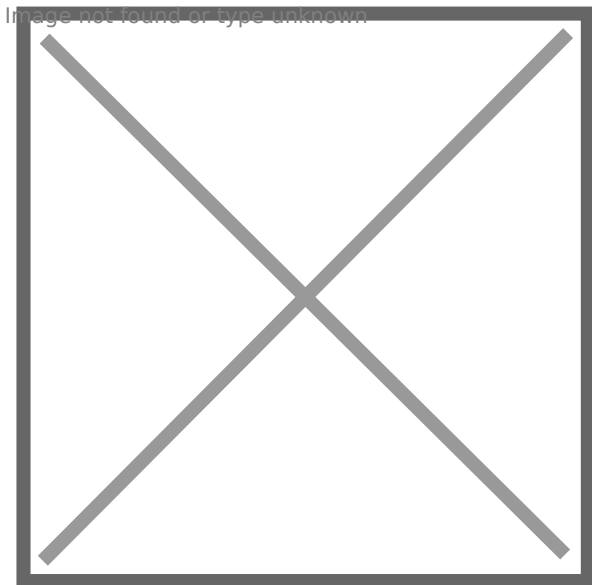
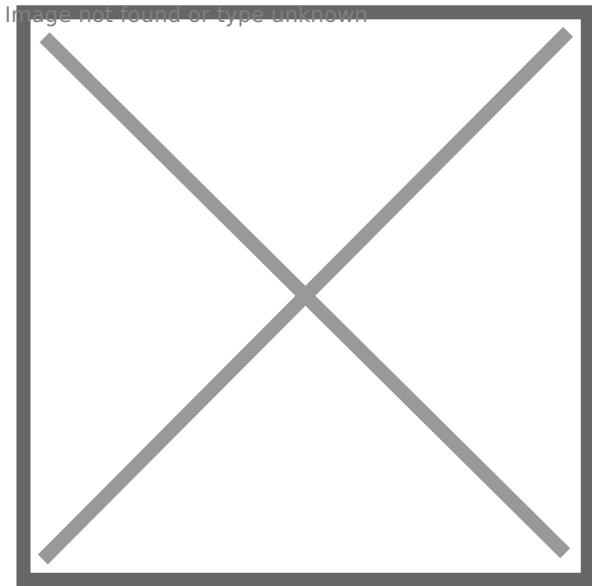
Don't forget things with stalk love eating owls for lunch. Winged Lioness and Hunter's Mark are both excellent options. These almost don't make the Good Tier due to you needing to go first to make the biggest impact.

Editors Note: [Ice Trap](#) is also an reasonably good answer outside of divine.

Exhausting Options

Tiring out the feathery foe is a good pivot for turn one. My favorite is light bearer. Nothing more hilarious than having a bird ineffectually thrown in your pheonixborn's face. You can choose to kill it off later if you have the battlefield actions. It's main weapon, Memory Drain, is neutralized.

Other cards worth mentioning are Astrea and until I was writing this article Rose Fire Dancer didn't occur to me as a good option. It falls under the bad list for costing two dice and one card, which isn't too bad. But, a 3/1 really needs to be dealt with by next turn or it becomes a problem causing your opponent to spend at least one Frog die or one attack action.



Rose Fire Dancer, Ally

Protect Your Hand Option

Acknowledging that owl exists as a super popular card is really the first part of your defense. Understanding how it affects gameplay is the second part. Realizing that owl isn't an issue if you simply DRAW A CARD to protect your first five is transcendent for some players. It was for me.

Swift Messenger, Abundance, Summon Ash Spirit, Summon Squall Spirit, Namine, and Saria are all excellent answers. Orrick is darn near owl proof with how much card draw he generates.

Recursion works exactly the same way as drawing a card in this instance. If you have an ally in your first five let it hit the discard pile if you are running ceremony dice or Xander.

Reorganizing the first five to spend a sympathy die to draw a card that is simply going to be discarded feels bad. But, it is way better than having a cohesive plan completely blow up in your face.

Acceptance Tier - Or, How I Learned to Love the Owl

Even with all of these options available sometimes your deck is just vulnerable to memory drain. If that is the case at least have a plan for it. One of my favorite decks right now is a first four that uses nine dice. And a fifth card that might be ok if I don't want to use my pheonixborn's ability. I have accepted if it gets hit by Memory Drain, fine.

Know which card is the least detrimental to your first five. Even if a card gets ditched that means you have dice leftover. Make sure you use them. Most dice can still provide value during the first turn even if you have to meditate to get the power side.

Just remember, before the game even begins if you see charm dice, get ready for owl hunting season. Heyo and GL!

About the Author

Jerod Leupold has been an avid gamer and advocate for over 30 years. He cut his teeth on the business side by founding and running Critical Hit Games in Iowa City for eight years before selling to excellent stewards. Now that he has time to take things like vacations he amuses himself by using his English degree and journalism background talking about game theory. He has been published under the Gamenomicon franchise for Party First RPG adventures and sourcebooks. As well as several articles about A Game of Thrones CCG and LCG back in the day. While he's never hoisted a grand champion trophy he has been an innovator and bride's maid an innumerable number of times.

Hard 30 – Good Draw, Bad Draw

Originally posted at <https://theshufflebus.com/hard-30-good-draw-bad-draw/> by **Jerod Leupold**; archived Jan. 9, 2023.

Hard 30 - Tiers of the Phoenixborn: Card Draw

The founding fathers may have wished it but not all draw is created equal. I've tiered out all the cards that have the word 'draw' on them and will judge them exclusively on that merit. Mostly it comes down to the style of the deck and what magic types you are running. Even if you are fully committed to a nature only deck, Ashes has some dice neutral answers for you.

Orrick Tier

The poster boy of clan Greedy McHoardy. Orrick is the alpha and omega of card draw. Between his ability and signature card, you lift two cards AND fix two dice for the cost of one. Even if you don't use Concentrate he's more efficient than any other option. Don't misread this. I am not saying Orrick is the only phoenixborn worth attempting to draw a lot of cards. He's just the most efficient.

Orrick Phoenixborn
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Great! But Only If You Build Around It Tier

These cards contain whole realms of theory to be explored detailing every nuanced aspect. This is not that article. I really like Abundance, Generosity, and Law of Sight. All three bring something to the gaming table. Ash Spirit nominally belongs here as a junior Abundance that costs one die every activation. Solid, but, you better have a plan for it.

Abundance is the best repeatable draw in the game. For both you and your opponent. The secrets of Generosity have just revealed themselves to me and I can't wait to explore them more. Law of Sight has been the cornerstone to a couple of solid builds for me in Lulu and Xander. Any deck where you want a targeted spell to 100 percent land free of reactions.

Cantrip Tier (Good)

Depending on what you are doing with your deck pretty much every cantrip slots into here. A cantrip is a card that replaces itself with a single card draw. None of these cards are going to set the world on fire but they give incremental value to a deck dedicated to drawing. Don't hammerfist a cantrip into your deck that doesn't further a deck goal. But, if you need some dice fixing or a cheap body. One cost cantrips are your jam.

I am currently having a dalliance with Spectral Assassin for small battlefields and aggressive swing builds. Its ability has stifled a couple of reactions that I know of so far. Others that earn honorable mentions include Accelerate, Hidden Power, and Particle Shield.

Other cards that creep into the cantrip definition are Squall Stallion and River Scald. Technically they are. But, no one is using them for their draw ability. Although it makes me want to drop Scald into a swarm deck and see what happens. But, no on Stallion. Even I have my limits!

Combo Tier

Here are your standard draw options that are good in other games; Changing Winds, New Ideas, and Sleight of Hand. I have run all three cards to varying degrees of satisfaction. None of them I found particularly exciting until it hit me.

What I discovered while reviewing this group was I wasn't putting much value on sifting. I think Rimea's ability is amazing if underused. There isn't an onus on building combo decks because there aren't many game-ending combos to exploit. However, if you are digging for that silver bullet or McGuffin, here are the excavation tools you need.

Sifters

The best of the bunch is New Ideas. On the surface, the initial cost of one die and two cards to draw three feels bad. However, if you bottom out your deck consistently, that card you tucked comes back around. Great for Molten Golds and a knight or two.

Nothing out muscles Sleight of Hand for pure deck plumbing power. Changing Winds is a really nice blend of the two. I have been wavering on Winds because I want to just put it in the bad tier but I think there are just enough merits. The initial scrying of the top two cards brings it up out of the dregs but only for combo decks.

Tutors

I debated whether I was even going to touch on fetch effects. I don't think they offer up anything to talk about. If you absolutely need to get certain cards for your deck to work, play them. If not, the draw is going to be more efficient. Cards like Augury, Emperor Lion, and Open Memory have a place in certain decks but should not be widely used.

And I then imagine if something like Koji, Augury, and Acceleration isn't something to exploit. Just dropping wrath effects all game long at a moment's notice. Will wonders never cease.

Just Bad Tier

Delayed gratification can be incredibly rewarding in the right context. Ripping cardboard is not one. Foresight, Iron Worker, Chant of Worship, and Expand Energy should not go into your common deck. In order to maximize the payoff for drawing cards, you need to have those options available right now. Not a round from now and not when someone dies. Certainly not after you play a reaction that might be stuck in your hand.

Worker is so close to being good. I really like the two basics of any color cost to smooth out a deck's magic types. But then he ends up being targeted. So...that means he's good then, right?

I almost forgot the Sympathy die itself. I'm going to file this way as bad. On the rare occasion, you have an extra power side just lying around then it's a great move to pick one up. It's even fine to meditate for the draw next turn if you have the side actions and it's early in the game. But, if you have nothing to spend the dice on and you have just free side actions to waste then you need to, er, maybe, try some different card combinations. Unless that's your plan. Then awesome.

I truly feel there is a perfect situation for every card in Ashes. Some situations just occur a LOT less than others to make the card itself all that useful. As much as I want Expand Energy to be reasonable I just haven't found a place for it. My best creation so far involves Law of Sight so you get rid of those awkward pauses waiting to use a reaction. It's still just ok... Internet, prove me wrong! Heyo and gl!

About the Author

Jerod Leupold has been an avid gamer and advocate for over 30 years. He cut his teeth on the business side by founding and running Critical Hit Games in Iowa City for eight years before selling to excellent stewards. Now that he has time to take things like vacations he amuses himself by using his English degree and journalism background talking about game theory. He has been published under the Gamenomicon franchise for Party First RPG adventures and sourcebooks. As well as several articles about A Game of Thrones CCG and LCG back in the day. While he's never hoisted a grand champion trophy he has been an innovator and bride's maid an innumerable number of times.

Battlefields – Should Ashes Reborn Rotate?

Originally posted at <https://theshufflebus.com/battlefields-should-ashes-reborn-rotate/> by **Jarod Leupold** and **ShuffleBusNeil**; archived Jan. 9, 2023.

What is Battlefields?

Battlefields is a new written series where Jarod and Neil discuss hot topics surrounding the Ashes community. The intent is for both authors to collectively voice their opinion in a more conversational style of writing. The goal is to help you the reader understand the complexities of various issues surrounding the Ashes Reborn community.

Should Ashes Rotate After the Time Cycle?

Jarod

Yes

I love lcg's. I played A Game of Thrones for all five years of its lcg cycle, the full run of Warhammer: Invasion, and most recently the Legend of the Five Rings. Heck, even as a game store owner I championed LCGs as an easy-to-stock, consistent revenue stream. And do you know what the hardest selling point was? The entry price point.

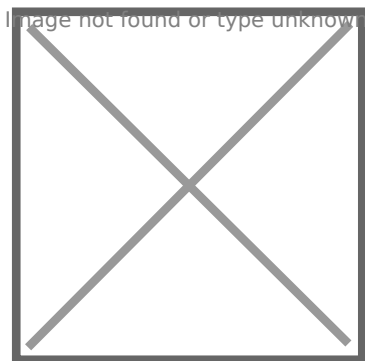
Neil

No

For card players familiar with ccgs, rotation is a staple of almost every game. And a necessary one for games with a long history. For instance, Magic the Gathering has roughly 18,000 unique cards. It would be absolute nonsense for any modern card player to consider playing a format composed of all available cards. Now while these formats do exist they have an extremely high barrier of entry to play both in skill and especially in cost. That's why a game like Magic needs to have set rotation to continue to thrive as a business and remain exciting for the newer player. So how does this translate to Ashes Reborn? Should there be a rotation? Absolutely.... at some point in the future.

Jarod

It takes a couple of expansions for an lcg to really find it's legs and by that time you are asking new players to drop north of five hundreds of dollars to collect competitive decks. While the preconstructed decks are a nice thought some of them are down right unplayable. Can you imagine NEW preconstructed decks with the knowledge Plaid Hat has reaped since the relaunch? The future of any game relies on new players. Let's begin sooner rather than flailing later!



Neil

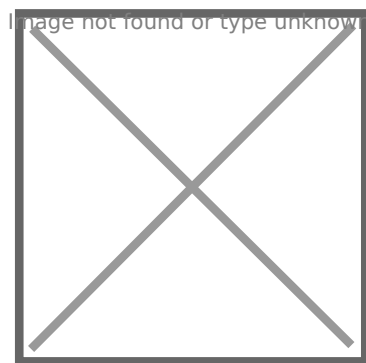
Let's begin with the easy math: money. If we are talking solely about cost as a barrier of entry then LCGs like Ashes have a value advantage over the CCGs due to the fixed versus random packs business model. The current of a full playset of Ashes will run about \$500 and can be extrapolated to roughly \$600 after the remaining Time packs are printed. A complete set (single copy of every card, not a playset) for the current Standard format of Magic range between \$180 and \$250. There are currently eight sets in that format. The \$600 price tag on Ashes seems like quite a discount by comparison. Obviously the full set only applies to collectors. If you are only interested in playing, the average cost of a Standard Magic deck was \$247 in 2021. Pokemon and YuGiOh were a little cheaper at between \$100 and \$200. Though they have the added incentive of different rarities of the same cards that can make those same decks cost upwards of \$500 if you like the bling factor.

So you could get into Standard for half the price of Ashes if you only want to play that one deck and then your biggest enemy becomes the rotation. As Standard rotates set out, you will need to reinvest into the format again if you plan to continue to play. You don't have to do that very many times to make your investment into Ashes look pretty good. That's why I think we are a long way from Ashes needing a rotation to reduce cost as a barrier of entry.

Jarod

A central component to Ashes is the idea of the Ready Spell. Something that is designed to be used every turn. So far we have 34 Summon Ready Spells and 39 Ready Spells for a total of 73. The impact of a Ready Spell combined with first fives means there is less variance AND it removes the need of multiple reiterations of cards that do similar things. I present the idea that one Ready Spell is just as impactful as one card in EACH set if not more. So 73 times 6 is 438.

Bringing the grand total down to 362 individual cards. For a game that sells millions. Has dozens of designers. And countless playtesters. All of a sudden, rotating at 270 cards doesn't look too bad does it?



Neil

The other, and more important factor in rotation is the gameplay of the current format. Is that gameplay fun and fresh? And is there anything going on that is warping the game? Starting from the top, fun is probably too subjective to actually define. Let's be honest, you wouldn't be reading this if you didn't find the game fun. I think fresh is a much better identifier of when we need to start thinking about rotation. We have been running competitive events regularly for over a year now and we are only recently starting to see recurring archetypes in the top cuts of both ShuffleBus and AIL tournaments. It took two full seasons of ShuffleBus before people started to narrow down the card evaluations for the Orrick and Lulu expansions. If that trend continues, we should see new decks in the format until at least three months after the last two time expansions are released. But I believe that there will be a much longer life of interesting decks beyond that time with the 40 new cards in the pool. We lived off just the base set for a long time before Jericho was released. The last consideration is format warping cards or combinations. The current chained list is the tool of choice

to solve these issues and I see no reason that rotation would be needed instead of or alongside chaining.

Phoenixborn Power Rankings – March 2022

Originally posted at <https://theshufflebus.com/phoenixborn-power-rankings-march-2022/> by **Carl Diaz**; archived Jan. 9, 2023.

Top 12 Phoenixborn of Ashes Reborn

This is a community power ranking of the phoenixborn in Ashes Reborn. The community ranks the current list of PBs from best to worst where I take a mean and median average of these rankings and present them to the community. Phoenixborn are first ranked by a median with mean breaking any ties. As this is the first list, I will include some historical aspects of Ashes Reborn.

This write-up is a couple of weeks late as it is April 2nd and the poll was conducted early to mid-March. At the time of these rankings, the Widow rush was all the rage, primarily in Brennen and James. Widows were such a topic of contention that a debate on the chain list had sparked.

While Widows and Brennen were all the rage, 4-book variants of Lulu/Aradel were still topping, Maeoni's giant Snake deck stressed every deck builds, and Harold's incredible consistency was definitely not forgotten. This poll was also taken just before a new set of expansions, Hope and Dimona. As such, I will also provide my predictions.

Without further to do...

#1 - Maeoni Viper

Median Ranking: 2
Mean Ranking: 3.71

Kaile_Winner
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Maeoni has been a force since the introduction of Ashes Reborn. While some have tried to make Snakeless Maeoni work, that has not been seen as worthwhile. Maeoni is Snake, and Snake is more often than not inevitable. Two variants of Snake have emerged, both debuted very early on in Ashes International League Season 4.

The first of which was created by Matt Bauers, Meteor Snake. The general idea is to use large AOE's such as Meteor and Nature's Wrath to buff up Hydras and a Root Armored Silver Snake.

It is often supplemented with Bears and Massive Growth. This deck went on a strong run to award Matt the title of AIL4 champion.

The second variant is a sympathy Snake deck with explosive growth and a large package of fast tempo removal created by myself. That deck has won both Shufflebus Season 1 and 3.

However, that was not the end of Snake's run. In Shufflebus 5, Kaile Phelps took my Snake deck and made it his own. He swapped out on some of the fast tempo removals in favor of more protection and heavier reliance on the card Hypnotize.

One thing for certain is that Maeoni is not going anywhere. While her package can be seen as pretty one-dimensional, it is not an easy task to plan for all the small variations that the deck can bring. I project that she will remain in the top 3 with Hope possibly taking the number 1 spot.

#2 - Harold Westraven

Median Ranking: 3
Mean Ranking: 3.47

ChaosTheory's Invite Decklist
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This was incredibly close with Harold coming in first in the mean average and Maeoni coming in first in the median average. Harold is the definition of consistency. There have been multiple seasons of Shufflebus with multiple Harold tops. Harold was also a popular choice in top cuts of AIL4 and AIL5.

Harold is the expert at incremental advantage in a game where >50% of Ashes games is at its core a game of incremental advantage. It is very difficult to discuss a standard build of Harold, however, I will highlight 3.

ChaosTheory's Harold deck for Shufflebus Invitational was in its simplest form a tempo Gates Thrown Open Noah deck but good. This deck was one that innovated the flexibility of having options of a mid-range, double knight, or GTO swarm opening. In no small part, this is due to Harold's free but dominant battlefield ability.

Brian B and I both have a Harold variant that takes advantage of Sonic Swordsman's Sonic Pulse ability. Brian's is heavier in charm, while I'm heavier in nature. Sonic Swordsman is among the best of Knights and Harold makes it even better. Brian eventually went more towards using units that have the tame ability instead of focusing on triggering Sonic Pulse.

Inquisitor and his Harold deck are the only one to win a big event. It makes sense that it is titled "Pile of Good Cards" as Harold is basically the engineer of good trades. That deck traded super high potential interactions for an insane amount of first five flexibility.

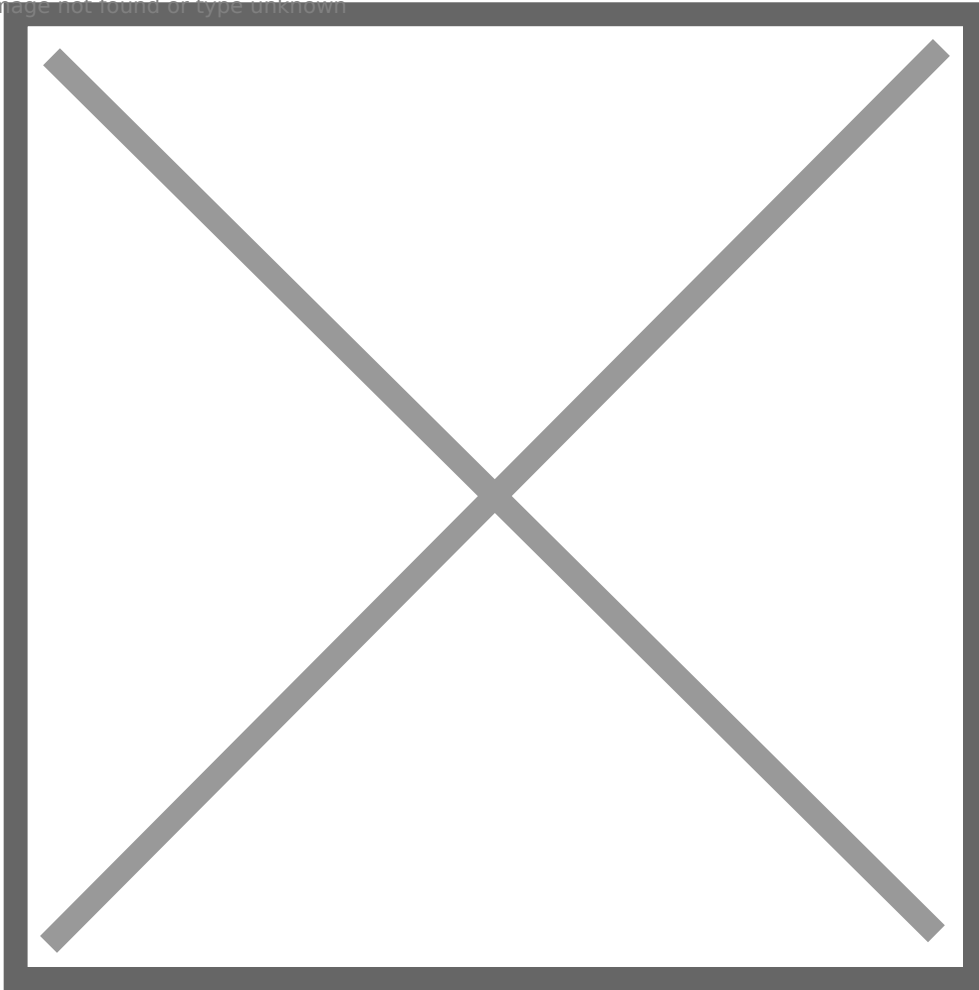
Overall, Harold continues to be a very high floor Pheonixborn but I have a hard time seeing that he will hold onto his 2nd placement in the next rankings. The game is going in a faster and smaller direction so using your ability and unit attack on big unit removal is seeming to be less valuable as we go forward.

#3 - Odette Odinstar

Median Ranking: 4

Mean Ranking: 5

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At number 3, Odette brings the most efficient package of removal into the game. She has a strong built-in answer to both Owls and Knights with a small weakness to fast swarms.

Odette is often a pick for a lot of jank lists due to her efficiency. However, like Maeoni, Odette has two competitive styles of decks.

The first is an Odette that utilizes Massive Growth and Hydra. Odette can use her ability to directly buff the Hydra for a total of +2 attack and +2 Terrifying. This strategy was first used in my build of "Hail Hydra," the deck that created the chain list by winning in round 1. After multiple parts of this deck became chained it was put away for a small time until Matt Bauers picked up a Hydra Odette and made it work to a top 4 placement in Shufflebus Season 1.

The deck has been silent since Kailie Phelps has won SB Invitational with a Hydra Odette.

The second, and likely more popular, Odette is an Odette burn list. This list is one that Jesse created and piloted to the top 4 of Shufflebus 3. It is an Odette that uses her efficient removal to get an early head start in the damage race and then finishes it off with burn. Matt Bauers refined a list very similar to this and made another top cut with it.

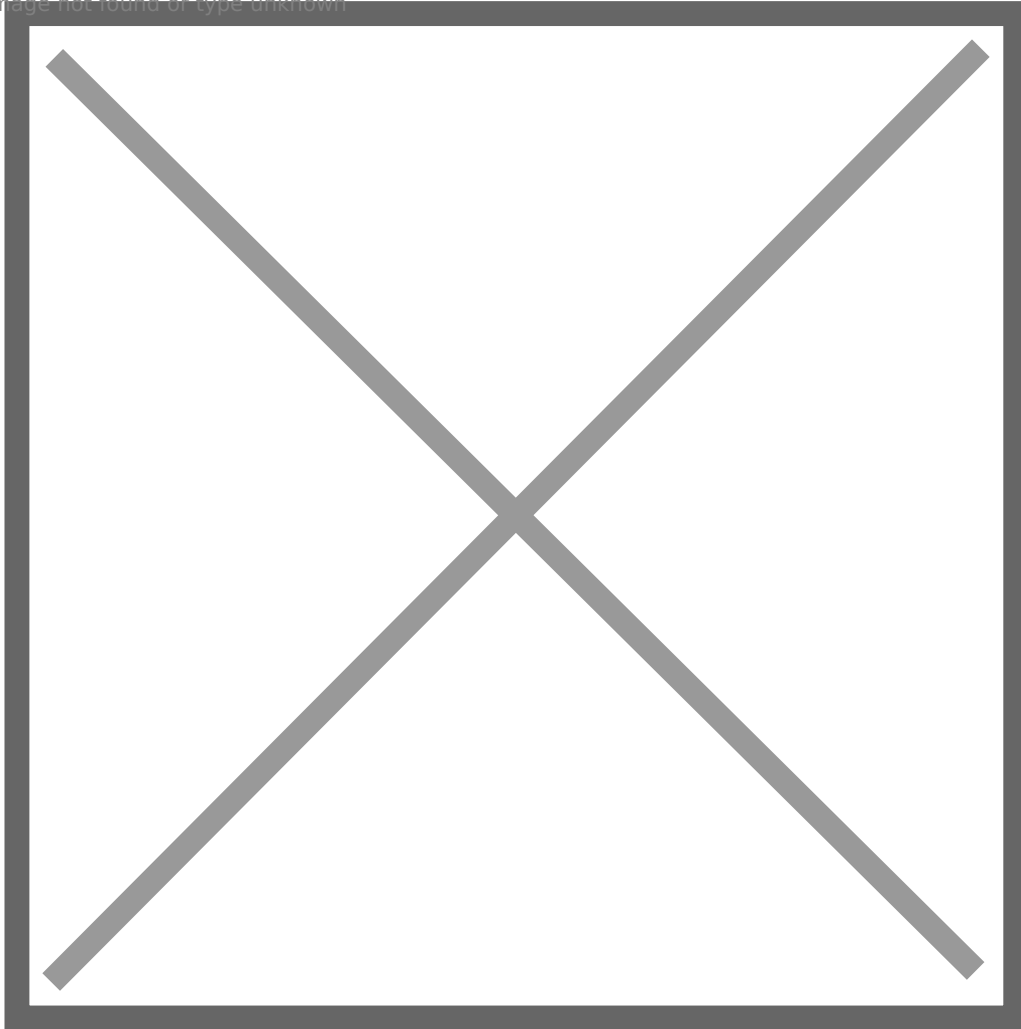
I project Odette to continue to be ranked highly but could drop a bit. She has a great matchup with the newer Echo decks but would need to build for her swarm weaknesses.

#4 - Aradel Summergaard

Median: 5

Mean: 4.82

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Being near but not at the top is no unfamiliar territory for Aradel. Always a very good choice and would love to have her but not the best. Aradel 4-book is a tried and true Ashes deck that will never go away. Gilder+Water Blast is one of the most feared sequences of removal that Ashes presents.

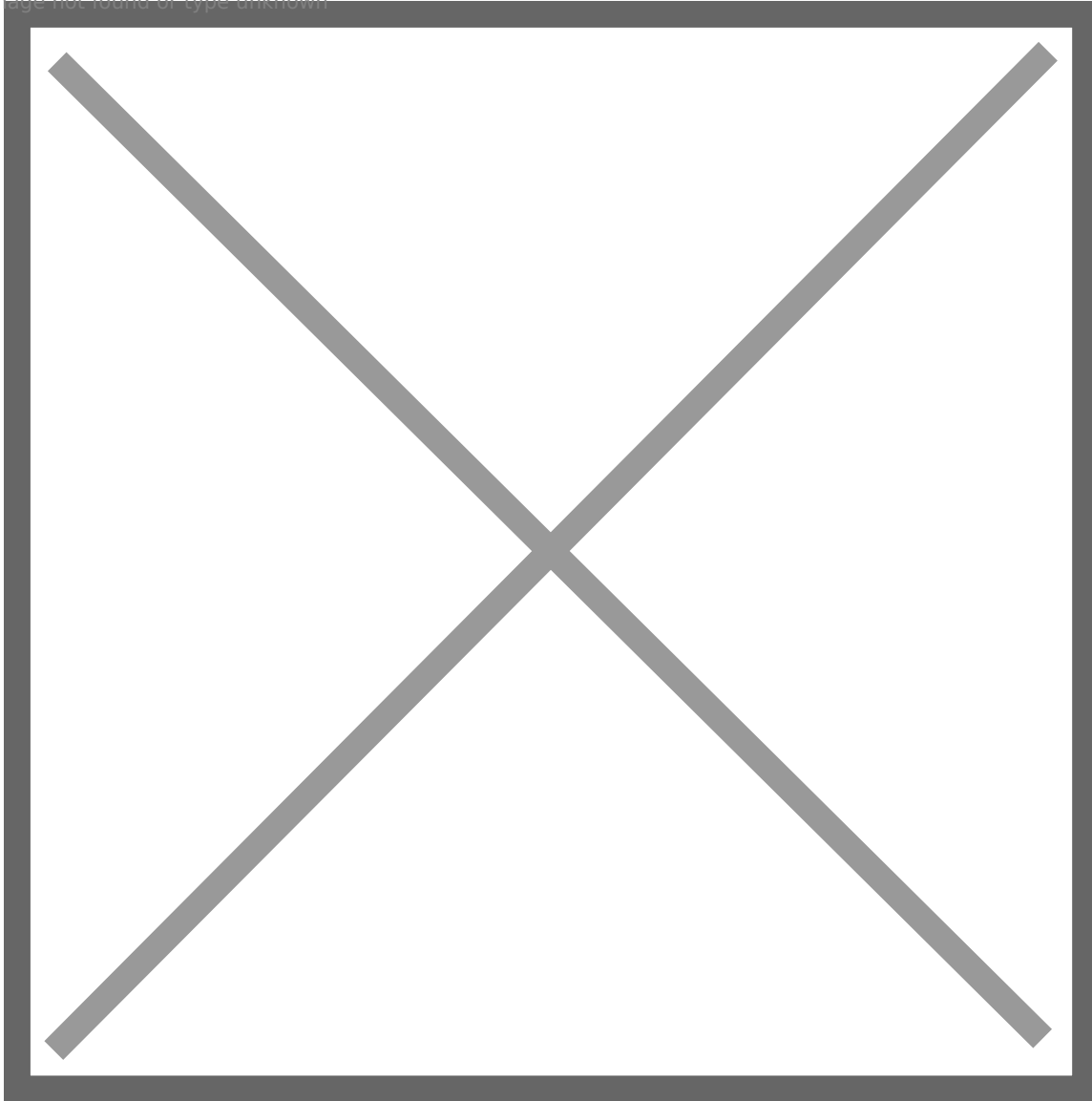
In Ashes Reborn, it was first topped by Philly followed by Matt G. Lately, Aradel presents the most efficient long game ability, the most efficient long game strategy with her 4 books, strong battlefield presence, and a favorite to win via fatigue; however, Aradel has shown some struggles against the tempo play of Widows. I foresee that she will soon figure that out and will continue to be near but not at the top of the list of Phoenixborn.

#5 - Lulu Firestone

Median: 5

Mean: 5

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Like Aradel, Lulu is a powerhouse as a 4-book Phoenixborn. There are a lot of similarities but I would sum up their differences as a floor vs ceiling approach. You can never go wrong with either but Lulu has a much higher floor but also a much lower ceiling. While I would hand many new players Aradel, I would not do the same with Lulu. Lulu has a slightly harder time dealing with Owls and is not as efficient as a baseline but her builds more than makeup for that.

Spoiler alert, Brennen is number 6. It frankly makes sense that Lulu is slotted between Aradel and

Brennen. Lulu is a mix of the battlefield powerhouse that Aradel is and the explosive burn that Brennen is. This is shown no better than in JK's Lulu deck that made the top 4 of SB5 and a variant of JK's deck that Matt ran to a top 8 in SB6. Both those decks ran a full burn package, a widow start, and an option of a 4-book start.

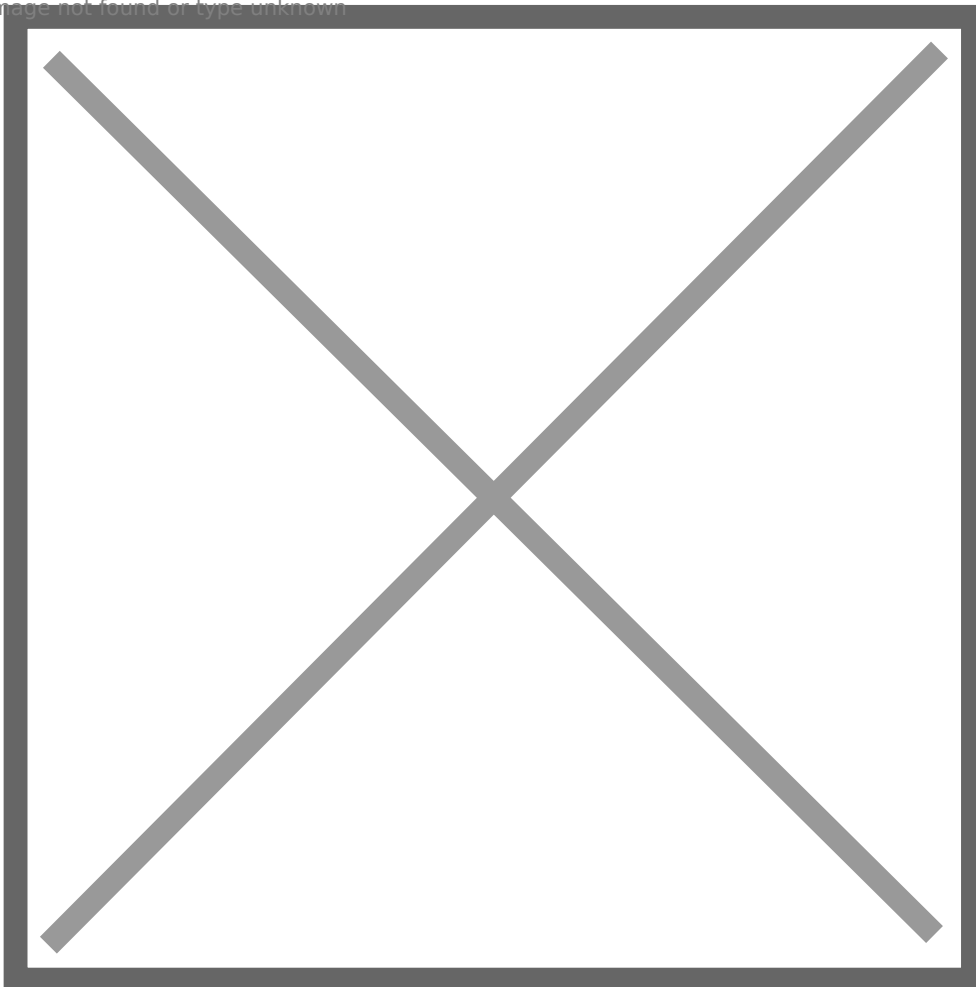
That said, my personal favorite use of Lulu is making use of one of the most efficient cards in the game, Rile the Meek. Lulu can run 0 attack units such as Lizard, Gilder, and Ruby Cobra in an aggressive deck better than anyone. This in turn makes Rile the Meek a fairly consistent 3 damage spell for 1 die. This was shown in my top 4 SB6 deck.

#6 - Brennan Blackcloud

Median: 6

Mean: 6.53

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I'm not sure if number 6 is a high or low first showing of Brennen considering this poll was done on the tail end of a lot of Widow chain talk. Outside of Aradel, Brennen is one that I would recommend most to new players.

It has a straightforward strategy and wincon. The threat of Brennen always loomed large in Ashes.

Outside of Brian B's impressive season 3 finalist deck with Vampire Bat swarms, Brennen saw mostly mixed success. Brennen as always was a huge threat but it was thought that feat was much more on Brian than it was on Brennen.

The mixed success stopped with Asterix. Asterix perfected his Brennen deck over the course of multiple seasons of SB and AIL. He and JK both made the finals of SB6 with Brennen, with JK winning.

They did this by being multiple and flexible in the first round. Taking what was once seen as a straightforward threat and making them unpredictable is no small feat. I project Brennen will continue to place in the mid-single digits in these rankings. While Brennen will be built for more in future decks, I don't see the innovations of Brennen decks as complete.

#7 - Xander Heartsblood

Median: 7

Mean: 6.29

Bill's Shufflebus Invite Deck

The top-ranked Phoenixborn in the ShufflebusNeil and ShufflebusJesse's rankings places in at a respectable 7 in the community poll. Xander has so much potential but such a low floor. This is bound to happen with such a low-impact ability and such a high-impact unique card. Xander is extremely strong when he gets the draws he needs but meditating an Earthquake far too many times can put him in trouble. Luckily he has a beastly high life he can fall back on.

Xander has topped an impressive number of times, most notably by ImpossibleGerman and Bill P. Bill in particular has topped with Xander multiple times and has given a home to some fringe competitive cards such as Power Through and Cerasaurus Mount.

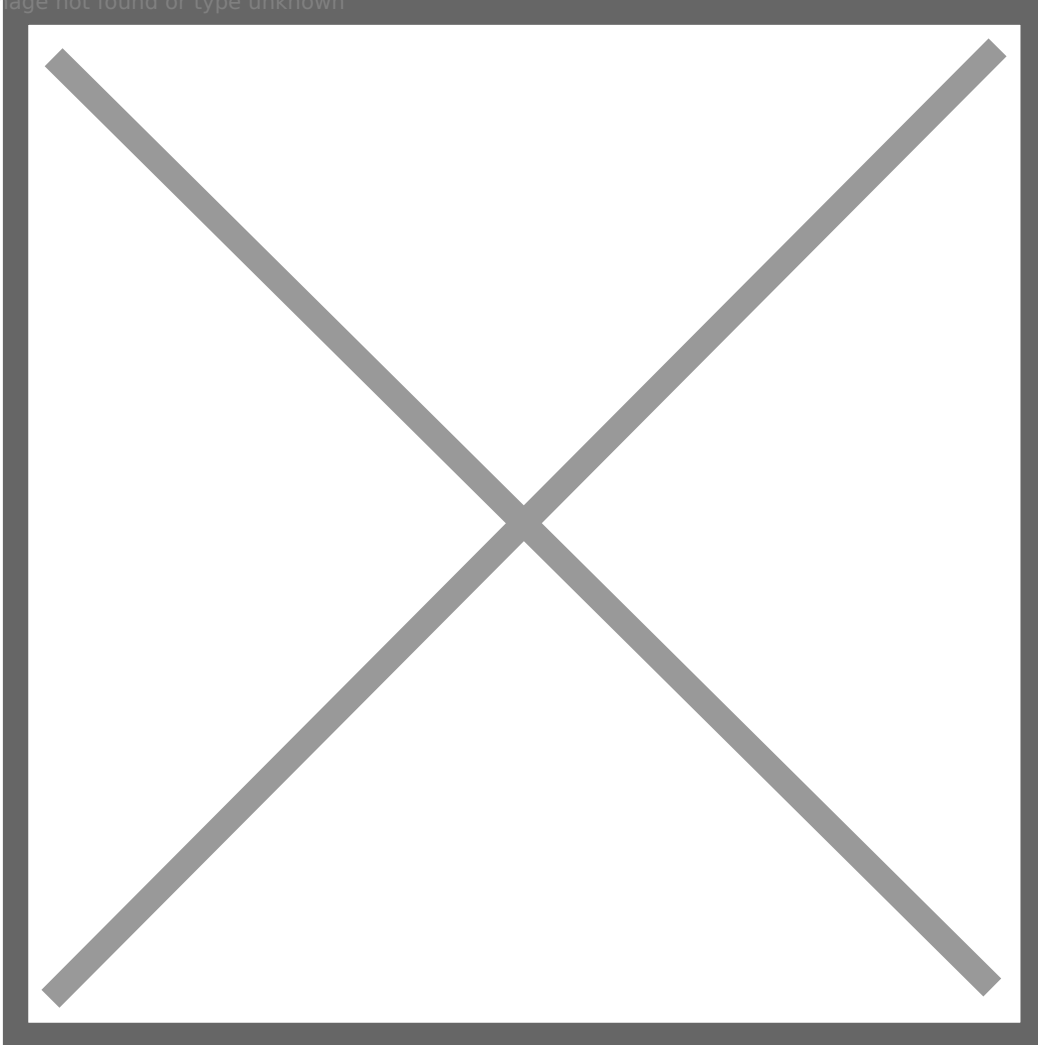
I project Xander to drop slightly but will continue to be a strong life. As Golden Veil is used less and decks are relying on a swarm of 1 life units with 1 or two beefy units, Earthquake can find a place in the meta.

#8 - Echo Greystorm

Median: 7

Mean: 6.88

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Like Xander, Echo is also a very high-potential PB with a lowish floor compared to the other top-tier choices. Echo, along with Coal, is the PB that received the most help in the new expansions. Realm Walker in particular is going to be a strong edition. However, remember this is a poll done before the new cards took effect.

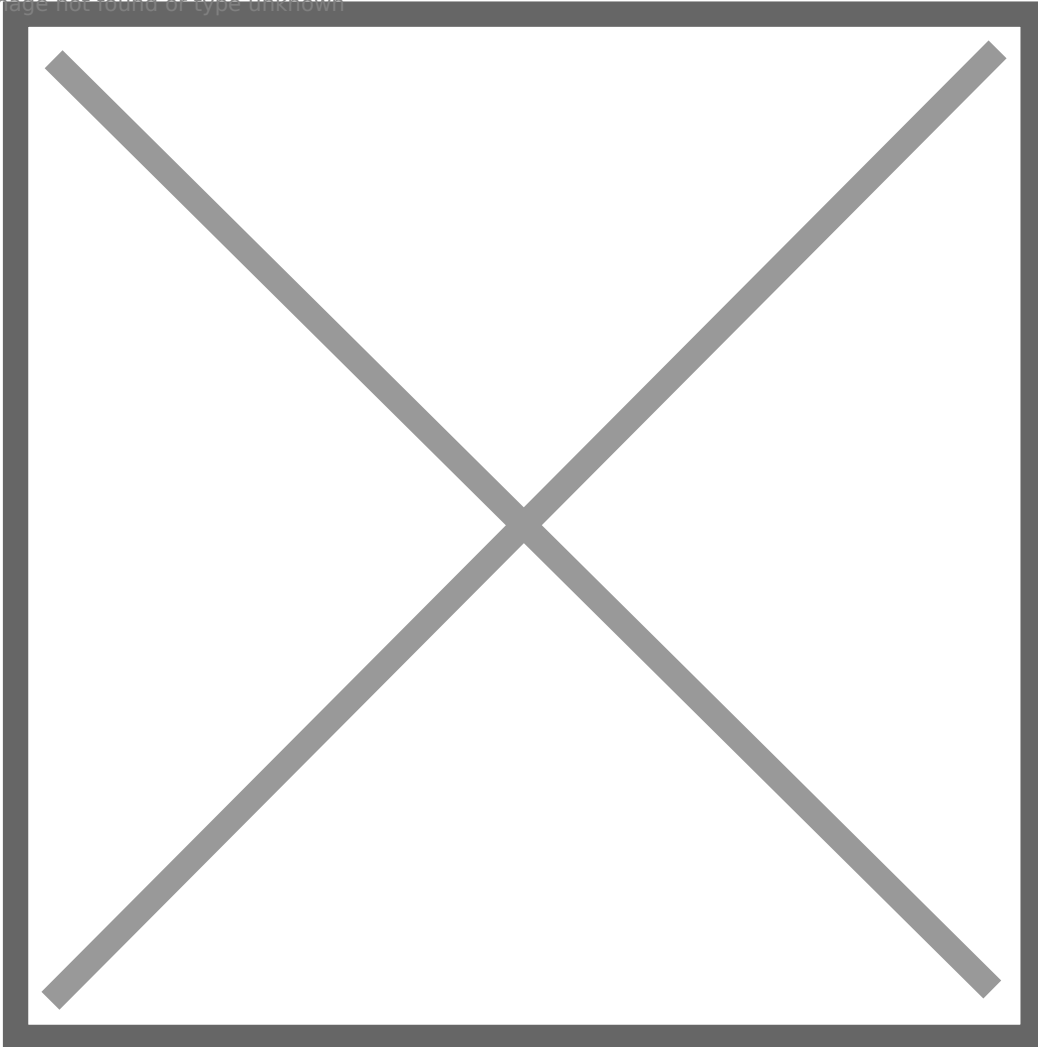
Still, I am surprised to see Echo beneath Xander. I find that Chaos Gravity is better than Earthquake. Also if all loyalty cards are lost to meditation, I would rather have Gravity Flux as a fallback than the 1 extra life that Xander provides. Given all that, Echo has not won and has rarely topped prior to these new cards. I project Echo to be top 5 in the next ranking.

#9 - James Endersight

Median: 10

Mean: 9.41

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James is one that can have very large highs but has not seen the most consistent success. It does have two popular builds. Fallen Meteor created by Matt Bauers and Raptor/Widow rush piloted by great success by both Kaukomieli and Inquisitor. Kaukomieli took it to a top 4 finish and along with JK has innovated using Bear as a flex option where usual explosive openings aren't possible. Inquisitor chose this to run in the finals of AIL5, winning him the title.

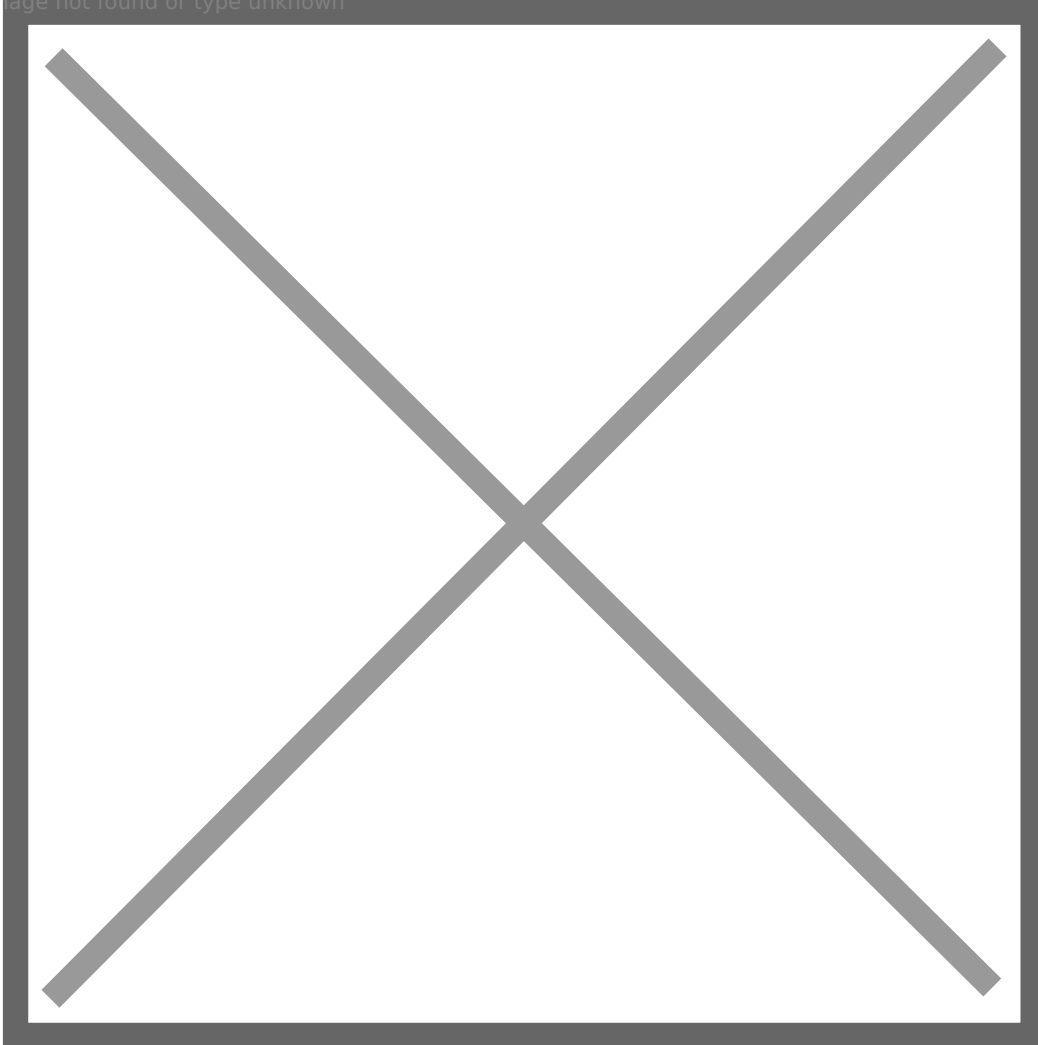
James, along with Jericho, hurt the most from the chain of River Skald. River Skald was so oppressive in James builds. James will also likely lose some of his niche to Hope. The more people prepare for Brennen and Hope, the worse James gets hit in the crossfires. I suspect James will drop as these rankings continue.

#10 - Leo Sunshadow

Median: 10

Mean: 10.06

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Leo is sitting in a rough spot. His biggest strength is the mill pressure that Glow Finch provides yet he really never claimed the best spot in a mill. It turns out that having efficient removal as your package and splashing into mill options is much more effective than Leo's efficient mill package while needing to find other options to control the battlefield.

In turn this leads to Leo's best build being a burn build. Killercactus's top 8 finish using a burn Leo is very impressive. However, if you are in burn, the question is why wouldn't you rather be in Lulu, Brennen or a more aggressive phoenixborn.

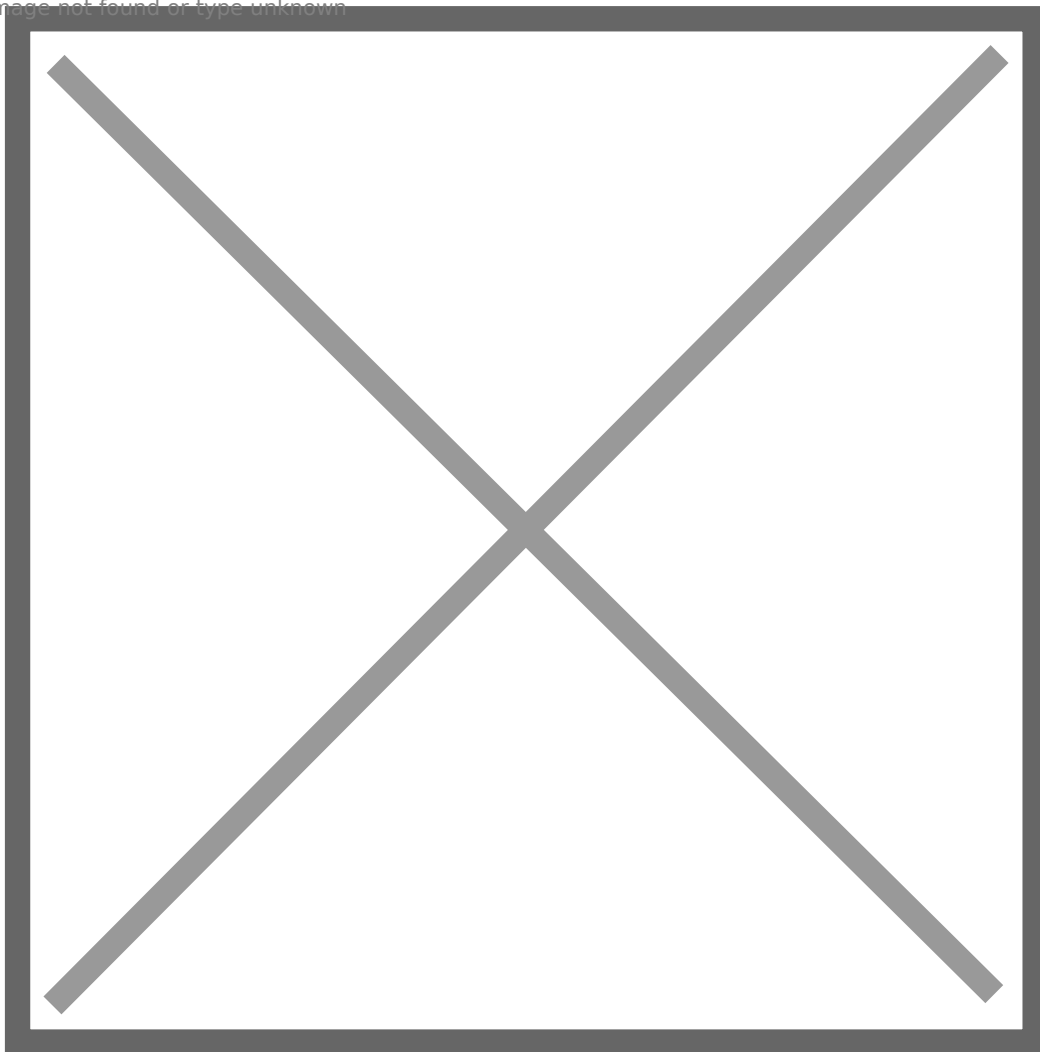
There has been thoughts of Leo+Sunshield being a hard counter to some of the Hope and Brennen decks running around. However, it loses hard to Realm Walker Echo and would likely get out done by more efficient builds. I suspect Leo to drop in the next ranking.

#11 - Jessa Na Ni

Median: 10

Mean: 10.59

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Jessa is a highly devisive phoenixborn. The debate of her ability being strong or not is a fair question but she has a lot going for her. She has Fear, a card that many rank as the best unique in the game. She also can close games better than anyone. One thing is certain, you don't want to get behind in life against Jessa. All that said, Jessa is a very tricky one to pilot. Her 4 battlefield limit, a unique that requires a unit to sac, and an ability that can be a trap to use are all major factors in the reason why many consider Jessa the hardest to play correctly.

This isn't to say that Jessa has not seen success. Nick Conley's "Fear the Hunt" is one of the most well put together decks in Ashes. It synergies every part of Jessa's package into a well oiled machine.

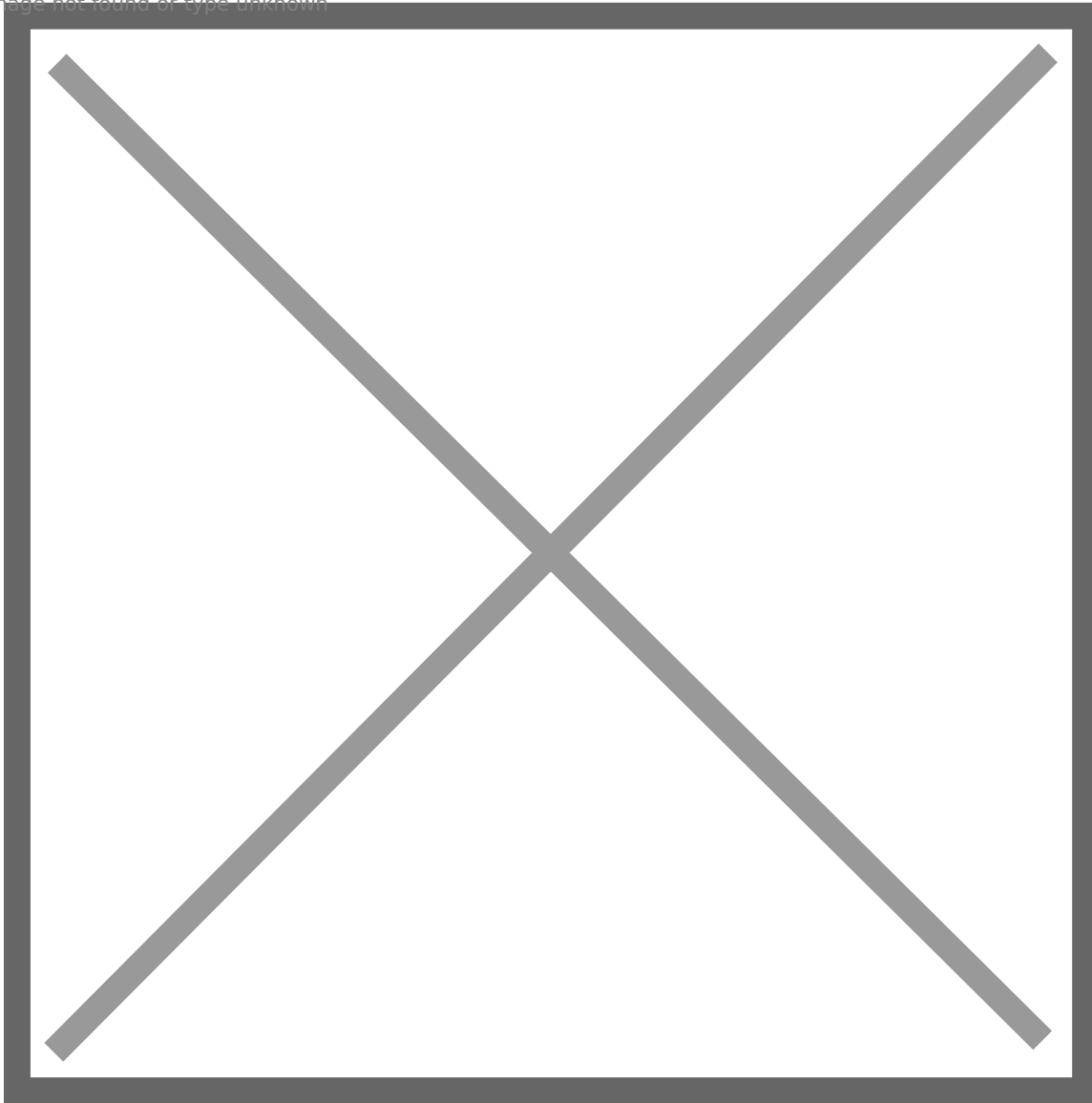
I personally don't see Jessa going much higher in the rankings but I think Jessa is one of the best in the game for the new meta. Fear just wrecks double down and Creepers and will always be strong against knights. She can attempt to out race Brennen as well as anyone. Jessa is the one PB that when I saw her ranking I was shocked but understood it. If Jessa is going to drop anymore, having a PB strong this low is good for Ashes diversity.

#12 - Coal Roarkwin

Median: 12

Mean: 11.82

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Fitting that Coal and Jessa slot near each other. They are both very strong phoenixborn and also both considered difficult to play. In my opinion, a well piloted Coal is one of the scariest things in Ashes. I experienced just that in losing in the finals to Matt B's Shufflebus Season 2 Coal. His use of gates thrown open, fester, and burn was strong and hard to stop.

While Matt is a strong player, the deck isn't given the credit it deserves. He made some strong deck building choices such as running To Shadows as Root Armor coverage on Knights.

Coal presents the most efficient removal in the game. Slash+Fester, Slash+100 Blades, and heck just Slash in general presents some scary threats when trying to keep on board. However, something scarier than Matt piloting that Coal is that the new style Coals are even better without needing Fester. While Real Walker Echo and Creeper Hope are getting all the buzz my number 1 contender deck is Wishing Wing Coal.

I project Coal jumping into the top 5 in the next rankings, but it would be no surprise if he doesn't. Coal is the most disrespected phoenixborn in all of Argaia.