

# Modern Land Destruction: A Primer

By ICE\_NINE\_

*This is a detailed primer on the land destruction archetype in the Modern format of the Magic: The Gathering Trading Card Game, focusing on the currently most competitive SOFR & Haktos (aka Mardu Boom Bust) strategy. We analyze the construction, alternate builds, and play lines of this specific deck; as well as explore core land destruction concepts such as the X-for-1 principle. Special thanks to the folks in the [RW Lockout Discord](#) community.*

## I. Introduction

### A. What is a land destruction deck? The X-for-1 principle

The first thing that probably stands out in this primer is how presumptuous the title is. Like, who does this *ice\_nine\_* think he is, claiming to be the expert on not only a deck but an entire *Magic: The Gathering* mechanic?

I won't deny that there's something not right with me. But, before anything else, I do think it's important to distinguish land destruction the *tool* versus land destruction the *archetype*.

Some decks in Modern use mana denial as a tempo piece to support a broader midrange strategy. But, as land destruction itself is not a win condition, it's generally understood that a deck committed to that strategy would never be viable.

Well, us in the RW Lockout Discord are entirely in the business of testing hypotheses like that—just like proper academics would, all the way down to the LaTeX typesetting. And so, for the past three years, we've been obsessively iterating on the same question: *What is the most competitive pure land destruction deck one can build in this format?*

And by “pure”, I mean it. As in, four playsets of land destruction spells at a minimum. Because it's only at that density do we start to realize the virtual **X-for-1 card advantage** of this classic mechanic.

What does that mean, exactly?

Take a simple [Stone Rain](#). On the surface, it's a 1-for-1: we use a card to get rid of a (land) card. But the true implications are more far-reaching.

Being down a land means the opponent has fewer cards they can cast—i.e., they've temporarily lost access to those cards. And the more land destruction we cast, the more cards the opponent loses and the more likely those cards stay permanently lost. So, by accruing a critical mass of land destruction spells, we can reach a point where every Stone Rain is costing the opponent multiple cards.

Hence the X-for-1. Where X scales upward based on how committed we are.

But since land destruction is inherently inefficient, we can't simply rely on that to gain an edge. We have to seek those virtual X-for-1s in other areas... And that's where Haktos comes in.

#### B. SOFR & Haktos (aka Mardu Boom Bust): The current best land destruction deck

As weird as it sounds, this deck's title is pretty straightforward. SOFR stands for "salt over forgone resources". And Haktos is [Haktos the Unscarred](#), a one-of-a-kind creature that complements our mana denial perfectly.

As we cause the SOFR by blowing up the opponent's lands, the 2-, 3-, and 4-mana cards in their hand can't be cast. And since those are the only cards that can potentially answer Haktos, he becomes effectively invincible. And with six damage each turn, an invincible Haktos will end the game in short order.



FIGURE 1. HAKTOS WITH HIS SUPPORTING CAST.

By running Haktos as our only maindeck permanent, we're literally blanking all of the opponent's cheap (i.e., 0- or 1-mana) removal. And by invalidating a chunk of the already-small subset of cheap spells they can cast with their limited mana, we've achieved another other major X-of-1 advantage.

The reality, of course, is not always that simple. Since land destruction is

expensive and decks play a lot of lands, the opponent will at times still have access to the right 2- to 4-mana removal spell or blocking creature for Haktos. And if they're putting pressure on us, we're often forced to throw down Haktos sooner than we'd like and put him in harm's way. Also, with only four Haktos, we'll sometimes have to keep the opponent in a sufficient lockdown for several turns before we draw the unstoppable win condition.

That's why, in addition to LD and Haktos, spot removal is so critical to this deck: to manage the opponent's developing board, and deal with anything there that could block and kill Haktos.

In broad strokes, games tend to play out in one of four ways: based on the two factors of (1) how much LD we resolve (relative to opponent's lands); and (2) how soon we draw Haktos:

	Draw Haktos early	Draw Haktos late
<b>Their lands – Our LD</b> $\leq n$	Flexibility to win either way (manage both risks)	Win via lockout (risk from their pressure)
<b>Their lands – Our LD</b> $> n$	Win via Haktos-racing (risk from die roll)	We're in trouble

*Note:  $n$  is typically 1-3, and is larger when opponent's mana curve is higher.*

### C. From LIBOR to SOFR: A short history

The first iteration of a competitive Modern land destruction deck emerged in 2020, with the Red-White LIBOR & Taxes deck (LIBOR = “lands in battlefield over-rated”). That deck was more committed to fully locking out the opponent, combining heavy LD with enchantment tax pieces like Suppression Field and Ghostly Prison. Its inevitability meant there was no need for proactive win conditions, with Goblin Dark-Dwellers and Magus of the Tabernacle serving a LD/lock purpose first and a finisher purpose second. ([Primer from January 2021.](#))

In its heyday from March 2020 to June 2021, LIBOR & Taxes achieved a large handful of Modern League 5-0s and Challenge Top 32s, with a notable [Top 8 in January 2021](#). But with the release of MH2, three things happened that forced an overhaul of that strategy:

- 1) *New ubiquitous must-kill 1-mana creatures.* Spot removal went from a nice-to-have to a necessity (to stop cards like Ragavan from spiralling out of control), taking resources away from the LD and tax gameplan.
- 2) *Proliferation of enchantment removal.* Prismatic Ending became a main-

deck option and Urza's Saga made Force of Vigor universal in sideboards, giving opponents a cheap/free way to wipe out the inevitability of a lock-out.

- 3) *Free creature removal*. Same idea of losing inevitability. Solitude and Fury (and also Unholy Heat) meant our incidental creatures were no longer reliable ways to win the game versus a 0- or 1-mana opponent.

So, just like the regulators circa 2021, MH2 did everything in its power to kill LIBOR. And it succeeded, as competitive LD spent a year in the wilderness until—as 2022 came—it rose from the ashes in the form of Red-White-Black SOFR. SOFR & Haktos started with [a pair of 5-0s later in 2022, before breaking out with a series of Modern Challenge Top 32s in March and April 2023](#).

The ingenuity with SOFR was figuring out how to twist those new meta-defining 1-drops/free spells to its advantage. After much testing, we found the underplayed Haktos to be the perfect centerpiece, with the do-it-all Vindicate being the key new supporting piece.

The RW Lockout community (322 in the Discord at last count) has been able to persevere, adapt, and ultimately succeed in these unbelievably hostile circumstances. And for that reason, I am confident in saying that *land destruction players are the most resilient players in all of Modern Magic*.

## II. Deck Construction

While SOFR & Haktos went through multiple iterations in its early lifetime, the core list has remained unchanged in the last six months.

### A. The Core

#### 4 [Haktos the Unscarred](#)

As described in *I. Introduction*, Haktos is the central card of SOFR & Haktos, the card that makes all the land destruction work. No Haktos means no deck, simple as that.

Literally no other Modern creature—or at least none close to the 6 power for 4 mana rate—is as universally protected as Haktos against *all* the 0- and 1-mana removal this format revolves around. Mainly Solitude and Fury, as well as the oft-used Lightning Bolt, Unholy Heat, Fatal Push, and Leyline Binding. Most decks have no way to remove Haktos, period.

And thanks to all our land destruction, he's only moderately vulnerable to the 2-mana stuff like *Terminate*, *Fire*, *Wrenn & Six*, *Drown in the Loch*, and *Lightning Helix/Searing Blaze*—and only if we get unlucky with the die roll. The 3-mana stuff is less concerning, and the universal removal (*Supreme Verdict*, *Liliana/Edict*, *Dress Down*, *Living End/Archon*) is even more expensive and/or rare.

And while the opponent could more likely have blocking creatures on the unlucky number (noting that all their 1-drops and tokens do nothing), the deck has twelve removal spells to clear the way.

When we slam down *Haktos*, we're pretty confident he's going to end the game in a few turns (2-3 at most, thanks to all the fetching/shocking). And if the opponent is already locked out on mana, it's guaranteed.

If they're not locked out, *Haktos* can turn a bad board position into an excellent one right away (albeit with some risk). In those games where they overwhelm us early and/or our LD isn't enough, just racing with *Haktos* is a legitimate—and often successful—path to victory.

One obvious limitation with *Haktos* is his quadruple-pip mana cost, but that doesn't actually constrain our manabase that much more. He's also not great in multiples. But the worst thing about him, by far, is that he's one-of-a-kind with no comparable; meaning we're building the deck's strategy around a single 4-of. Which isn't great, but it's what we have to do.

#### 4 **Vindicate**

Behind *Haktos*, *Vindicate* is the most important card in *SOFR & Haktos*. It does double-duty: first and foremost to destroy lands, but also to clear away *Haktos* blockers or remove a game-breaking permanent.

The often-cited weakness of flexible cards like this is that its rate isn't great for any of its uses. But here, that's not the case at all. For *Vindicate*'s most frequent LD use, 3 mana is on par. And even for non-land removal, its universal, unconditional, permanent effect makes it well worth the theoretical extra we're paying up (especially later in the game when it's most needed for removal).

And because our strategy requires us to pivot so drastically—between LD-lockout or *Haktos*-aggro—*Vindicate* is the critical fulcrum that furthers our gameplan in both situations. It's an unmatched combination of versatility and efficiency, and the perfect sidekick to *Haktos* no matter what order they come in.

## *B. Land Destruction*

### 4 Boom // Bust

Boom is the only 2-mana land destruction spell in Modern, making it the most critical of the 13 dedicated LD cards in this deck. Keeping the opponent stuck at 1 mana (2 if we're on the draw) is a massive difference from them being at 2 or 3.

But with only Flagstones of Trokair as a Turn 2 target on our end, we only have a 18-22% chance of Booming on curve. So that use case isn't that reliable, but it'll still give us a significant advantage a decent amount of the time.

But beyond that, Boom is still our best LD spell because on Turn 3 we can Boom one of our eight fetches, and hold priority to fetch a land that we can keep untapped for that critical early turn interaction.

And later on, the worst-case possibility of killing our own land isn't a big deal since by then we'll typically already have a land surplus.

The Bust mode won't be used often, but can be a game-changer at certain times: like if we've thrown down a Haktos and want to seal the game, or if we're in an impossible position facing 4-6 lands on the other side.

### 4 Molten Rain

### 4 Stone Rain

Out of the three Red 3 mana LD options in Modern, Molten Rain is the best one for us. Because the 2 damage (which will almost always happen) makes a meaningful difference for getting to lethal with Haktos, speeding up the clock a full turn about one-third of time.

Stone Rain gets the edge over Pillage for the final slot. Although getting to three lands with only one Red should be rare, ensuring we don't suffer the massive tempo loss in that event does make a material difference.

With 16 direct land destruction spells (including Vindicate), we can pretty reliably blow up a land a turn for most of the early- to mid-game. This means that if the opponent hasn't kept a land-heavy hand (usually in Game 1), we can often just eliminate all of their mana before they can get much going. At that point, winning is very likely (even without Haktos): since we're getting value from most of our draws, while they have to wait specifically for a land.

While not all games will lead to that lockout state—either because the opponent kept a lot of lands and/or we had to cast Haktos early—just this heavy LD

pressure can disrupt them (and protect Haktos) to give us the needed tempo advantage to win with the 6/1 Human.

## 1 Thoughts of Ruin

Of course, with most Modern decks running 19-25 lands these days, we often can't match them one-to-one with LD. Thus, Thoughts of Ruin serves as a 17th LD card with the powerful effect of eliminating multiple lands at once.

When timed right, this card can create a massive swing in the game. It's the only way to bring the opponent down from many lands to none/almost-none while keeping our mana reasonably intact. And our hand size seems to line up with the ideal destruction number on both sides surprisingly often (noting our flexibility via land drops). Plus, unlike spot LD, it can eliminate fetchlands and indestructible lands.

So why only one? Well, Thoughts of Ruin can be unreliable: in a tight, interaction-heavy game, we sometimes won't have enough cards in hand to make a meaningful dent in our opponent's lands and/or we're too tight on lands ourselves. With only one, we'll usually be able to find a window to cast it for at least some value; and it doesn't hurt too much as a dead draw. But with two or more, we're compounding the loss of our own lands (making the 4-mana Haktos more difficult) for a sweeper effect that by definition gets weaker in multiples.

### C. Interaction

## 4 Prismatic Ending

It's not quite Vindicate, but Prismatic Ending does everything we want out of a removal spell. It answers those high-impact 1-drops in time and has the versatility to deal with pretty much anything the opponent can cast later on (since our LD will often limit them to max two or three mana), providing crucial mid- to late-game backup and assurance that Haktos won't be stopped.

Like Vindicate, P-Ending's value is in its versatility combined with reasonable efficiency in each of its use cases. It's an especially great fit here given our serious gap in 1- and 2-mana interaction (to deal with cards that get under our LD), our natural three-color build, and our mana denial.

## 4 Lightning Bolt

An overall less versatile but more fast and efficient Prismatic Ending. While there are some key permanents it can't handle, it deals with the most problematic one-drops (and many two- and three-drops) even better. Instant speed is

important to fit the Bolt in before we start casting LD, and to disrupt things like Dashed Ragavan or creature-based combos.

Bolt is also valuable as reach when swinging with Haktos. Just one will quicken the clock half the time (and a pair guarantees it), which will often make the difference in a race.

With eight one-mana removal spells (not counting Tithe and Inquisition on the play), we can be reasonably confident of having a first turn answer to Ragavan et al. And with twelve spot removal spells, we have reliable support for a safe Haktos offensive when that time comes.

#### 4 **Mana Tithe**

With so many powerful spells in Modern able to get under our 3-mana LD, we need to load up on as much cheap interaction as we can. And Mana Tithe is perfect for denying the opponent's on-curve 1- and 2-mana threats in that short early window.

And although later on it does require the opponent to be tight on mana, that'll usually be the case if our LD is working reasonably well. (And if not, we're sometimes behind enough that it doesn't matter either way.)

Plus, Tithe is an important tempo play when racing with Haktos. With our mana tight and only a few turns remaining in the game, it squeezes in some cheap pseudo-LD for the one or two turns the opponent has left to act.

What sets Tithe apart from our other removal (and makes it worth its tighter margins) is its ability to deal with *all* spells and deny many of those permanents' powerful ETB effects in the first place. Along with the mana advantage we're often gaining by countering a 2- or 3-drop at the least.

#### 3 **Inquisition of Kozilek**

I'll say right away that hand disruption isn't a great fit with a land destruction strategy, and that Inquisition of Kozilek would likely be the first card swapped out if/when a better card comes along.

With our LD stopping the opponent from casting spells, we're letting them gradually accumulate the resource of cards in hand to a point where discarding any one of them will have limited effect (since they'll often have something else nearly as good to cast instead).

However, while IoK loses a lot of value as the game goes longer, it does provide an important additional dimension to this deck:



- It's the only way to get ahead of a critical counterspell, which is usually cheaper than our LD and would cause a huge tempo loss for us that we may not recover from (especially since we're tapping out in those early turns).
- Four Tithe is simply not enough to prevent all the game-breaking spells (W6, Blood Moon, Fable, Living End/Creativity) many decks play, so a way to pick off extras is critical.
- If the opponent recognizes our deck as LD, they'll often mulligan to a hand that's heavy on land and light on spells. Meaning that their entire opener could hinge on just a single card. Discarding that one card might just cause their entire game plan to fall apart, mana denial or not.

At a minimum, IoK is a generally solid way to stop the opponent from casting their best upcoming threat in the early-to mid-game. But unlike with Mana Tithe, we're not letting them waste the valuable mana/turn to cast that card, which caps its upside value somewhat.

#### *D. Manabase*

When deciding how many lands to include in SOFR & Haktos, the key question to ask is: how reliably can we hit our third land drop?

Like it or not, this deck relies heavily on casting a Turn 3 land destruction spell. And with 24 lands, the probability of that is not great, as we have 5-9% chance of drawing a two-land opener. That's a sizable share of games we're likely losing for mana reasons alone.

Still, there's not much we can do about that. Playing more lands has a diminishing benefit on those odds, while at the same time exacerbating the other issue of mid- to late-game mana flood (which our lack of card advantage or filtering pieces makes us vulnerable to). So 24 lands it is.

#### **4 Arid Mesa**

#### **4 Bloodstained Mire**

Fetchlands are pretty much a must for a three-color list like ours. While we can skimp a little by going 12 Black sources (which gives us 6-8% for missing a Turn 3 Vindicate and 13-17% for missing a Turn 1 IoK), we have to go heavy on Red and White sources, at 19 and 20 respectively, given Haktos's requirements.

Eight fetches is enough to make the numbers work, Plus, they do have some moderate synergies with our strategy, with Turn 3 Boom-into-untapped-land be-

ing the main one. Also, our mostly reactive Turn 1 and 2 plays means they can save us some shock damage, and the deck-thinning materially mitigates our later game flood issues.

In theory, we could run one or two more fetches, but at that point we start having a real risk of running out of fetchable lands for marginal benefit.

### 1 Savai Triome

The obligatory one-of Triome in a three-color deck, though it works pretty well here. It's not too awkward in the opener given our sparse two-mana slot, and in the mid- to late-game flood situation it provides a valuable cycle.

### 3 Sacred Foundry

### 2 Blood Crypt

### 1 Godless Shrine

As per Modern custom, the non-fetch manabase starts with the shocklands, which more or less mirror the color concentration in this deck.

Sacred Foundry has the most copies given the centrality of Haktos to the deck. Of the Swamp shocklands, Blood Crypt has the edge over Godless Shrine since Red has the Molten Rain double-pip and we're already forced to run four mono-White sources with Flagstones. Still, the 1-of Godless Shrine is important to give us another Black option for Flagstones-fetching and complements fetching painlessly for a basic Mountain.

### 4 Flagstones of Trokair

Flagstones is arguably our most important land, as it lets us cast that sweet Turn 2 Boom (and a much more advantageous Thoughts of Ruin), at negligible opportunity cost. Unlike Darksteel Citadel (which can't be used to cast Haktos) and those ETB tapped Bridges.

The mono-White limitation can be managed pretty seamlessly, and the color fixing from its destruction is surprisingly useful.

### 3 Sunbaked Canyon

This deck's limited remaining land space is best suited, by far, to horizon lands. Sunbaked Canyon significantly mitigates our flood weakness and gets cracked for use pretty early (given our 4-mana high end). The extra pain it creates—in the few instances that even matters—is well worth that guaranteed utility.

That said, adding a fourth Canyon gets iffy; mainly for space reasons, but also because of the additional pain.

## 2 Mountain

Having both Mountains as our basic lands is mainly to balance out the mono-White Flagstones. And two basics is the right number, to ensure two painless untapped fetches per game (the max we'll ever need).

Swapping for one Plains is real consideration, as Red is heavy enough to spare one less source. It allows a painless early Prismatic Ending or Mana Tithe (if we don't have Flagstones). It also allows us to not be completely shut down by Blood Moon; though that argument is very weak since our two most important cards each require a second non-Mountain land.

But there's the issue that not all the fetches can get both basics; and that perhaps tips the scales. It's a very even decision.

### *E. Sideboard*

Given the diversity of the Modern metagame and the tight synergy of the cards in this deck (i.e., high opportunity cost of swapping anything out), all the sideboard cards of SOFR & Haktos fall into a similar bucket: of being fairly versatile and fairly impactful, but not too much of one at the cost of the other. Since none of these are amazing options worth deviating a lot from our core gameplan for, most will be 2-ofs.

## 3 Ghostly Prison

### 2 Magus of the Tabernacle

There are times when SOFR just won't do it, and we have to go back to LIBOR. Facing a creature-heavy deck is one of those times.

Those decks often run multiple creatures across the 2- to 4-mana spectrum, giving them a much better chance of blocking (and killing) Haktos, which makes him a much less reliable path to victory. Also, we have trouble matching them one-for-one with removal. Thus, we're forced us to go back (at least partially) to the "inevitable lock-out" win condition using a pair of old X-for-1 tools...

If the opponent is low on mana, Ghostly Prison effectively says "creatures our opponent controls can't attack", while Magus of the Tabernacle effectively becomes a one-sided Wrath every turn. Even if they can get in a few attacks or keep a few creatures alive, shutting off their mana for other value actions will

often help induce a lock-out eventually. The permanent effect of both makes them much more valuable in this deck than a one-shot sweeper.

What's nice about this Prison-Tabernacle pair is that the decks most weak to one (or both) are also the ones that don't have ways to get rid of them—thus preserving the X-for-1 of blanking the opponent's removal:

- Ghostly Prison is best versus decks that rely on attacking, which tend to be Red, Blue, and/or Blue (Scam, Shadow, Prowess); whereas enchantment removal is all in Green (Force of Vigor/Foundation Breaker) and White (Prismatic Ending/Leyline Binding).
- Magus of the Tabernacle hits hardest those Green or White decks with a lot of mana dorks (Yawgmoth) or static-value creatures (Hammer, Affinity). While most the creature removal is in Red or Black (Bolts, Unholy Heat, Fatal Push, Terminate), and creature-heavy White decks often can't fit Solitude or Binding.
- Then we have tribal decks, which are incapacitated by *both* Prison and Tabernacle and don't tend to run much (if any) removal.

Of course, the sum of those matchups isn't common enough to warrant maindeck consideration for Prison and Tabernacle—especially since these cards are much less useful otherwise. But the role they do fill is so unique and powerful that it's worth devoting a full third of the sideboard to them.

## 2 Obsidian Charmaw

Obsidian Charmaw will usually come in whenever Magus of the Tabernacle does. Firstly, if it's safe to play Tabernacle (i.e., no cheap creature removal) it's also safe to play Charmaw. Also, an extra two LD effects are valuable when we're committing fully to the lockout plan. And finally, those are often the creature-dense matchups that Haktos struggles against; meaning Charmaw with its size and evasion becomes an important supporting win condition.

Charmaw is also perfect against any combo or big mana deck, as they're typically light/absent on removal and put so much pressure with getting to some auto-win trigger point with their mana (3 for Living End, 4 for Creativity, 6 for Titan, 7 for Tron) that having a card that can double as LD tempo and a fast clock is super-valuable.

And just as one final bonus, many of those decks above run colorless-producing lands—like Cavern of Souls, Urza's Saga, Tron lands, or all those Titan utility lands—to make Charmaw even more efficient.

## 2 Boil

A true X-for-1, in both the virtual and literal sense.

Decks that play a lot of Islands are either Blue decks that can counter our LD spells or Dryad decks with lots of lands. In both cases, the opponent is more likely to accumulate a surplus of lands, allowing Boil to achieve maximal value by destroying multiple lands at once. The instant speed is also critical for catching a blue mage napping (when they tap out, usually at end of our turn) or at least forcing their hand to clear the way for something strong we have next turn.

Having a means to drastically swing the game versus a land-heavy opponent makes the pure lockout significantly more likely. A well-timed Boil can very often turn a tough position into a sure win in a quick instant (no pun intended).

## 2 Trinisphere

For the opponent, it's tough to have all their spells cost three mana when they don't even have three mana to use. And unlike the other permanents we stay away from due to susceptibility to removal, Trinisphere has the benefit of rendering the opponent's cheap removal uncastable.

Trinisphere is quite a powerful card. So why is it not in the maindeck? Well, casting it on curve (or even in the turns after) means casting it instead of an LD spell. And missing that turn of LD pressure increases the likelihood that the opponent can cast that much more powerful 3- or 4-drop... with Trinisphere doing nothing about it at all.

Unless the opponent is playing mostly 1-drops, Trinisphere is at best as good as LD. Yes, it's great at locking up the game once we've got them low on lands, but in most cases that's just a win-more.

That said, there are certain match-ups where Trinisphere provides a unique value, namely Cascade decks or hyper low-to-the-ground aggro decks (Burn). It's also a decent 1-of as a way to handle a longer game versus a deck with free spells.

## 2 Rest in Peace

To fill the always-necessary sideboard role of graveyard hate, this deck uses the most universal option of them all.

For us, Rest in Peace hitting lands (and hitting them permanently) is most imperative, since lands will always be the by far most important cards in our opponent's graveyard. All thanks to Wrenn and Six. A W6 that's unchecked for even a few turns takes away any potential lockout and forces us win via Haktos

tempo. Even if we kill W6 right away, the opponent has already gained a 2-for-1 card advantage while we've missed a turn of LD and are on the back foot. Landing a Rest in Peace eliminates all of those major issues.

This card is also useful against any graveyard-synergy deck, though most of those are resilient and have other primary paths to victory—making RIP often just a one-of in those match-ups.

RIP does have some downsides, but none affect us much. It is a permanent that's a magnet for removal, but the ETB effect ensures a strong minimum value no matter what. And while it does non-bo with the Flagstones, by the time that happens we'll usually have more lands than we need anyways.

### 1 Gut Shot

To be a 1-of in the sideboard, a card has to fill a very specific role. It has to do something somewhat differently (to be worth a slot in the first place), but that something can't be too critical (otherwise there'd be more than one). It should also be coming in decently often, to be worth the marginalness of the value-add.

Gut Shot fills that bill perfectly. Its special value is limited to removing Ragan, Esper Sentinel, and arguably mana dorks with a meaningful tempo advantage. And although that use case seems narrow, the power and commonality of those few cards—and criticality of early-game tempo in those match-ups—means it's worth including as a fifth Bolt.

All that said, it's a spell that literally just does 1 damage. And a card like that should never be anything more than a 1-of.

### 1 March of Otherworldly Light

The unique narrow value of March of Otherworldly Light comes from being a game-changing 1-mana instant speed LD spell against the commonly-played Urza's Saga (and also artifact lands).

But outside of that, March will often make sense as copy number five of Prismatic Ending. Its one extra cost means it'll never be as good, although the instant speed and possibility to hit 4-plus drops does close the gap partially.

### III. Alternate Builds

#### A. Similar Archetypes

The infamy and (minor) success of LIBOR & Taxes and SOFR & Haktos over the last three years has spawned significant growth in the Discord community and the development of new strategies that also leverage this land destruction mechanic.

None of these decks are pure “land destruction decks”, as they play much more closely to the Modern midrange decks that use LD as a component. Still, it’s interesting to see where the hive mind is at for this underexplored middle area.

#### Nahiri Boom

Nahiri Boom has seen the most consistent MTGO success outside of LIBOR and SOFR, with several [Challenge Top 32s](#) and League 5-0s. The main idea here is that the Flagstones and indestructible lands we’re already using for Boom can naturally double as Cleansing Wildfire targets to ramp us to casting powerful 4-mana Planeswalkers like Chandra, Nahiri, and Karn.

It’s a midrange deck that wins via accruing Planeswalker value, with good creature support (Seasoned Pyromancer, Fury) and interaction. There may be one other playset of land destruction to support Boom.

#### RW Saga

RW Saga is effectively a Ragavan/DRC/Esper Sentinel midrange deck, with its gameplan centering on those three powerful 1-drops. Operating on a very low curve, it can be aggressive in trading off lands with the opponent at a discounted rate—via Crack the Earth and Boom. Urza’s Saga is the glue piece for several artifacts, while its creature-centric strategy requires filling out the rest with interaction (with no room for more expensive LD).

This list did [win a Modern Challenge in January 2022](#), but since then hasn’t seen much play. Likely because there are existing Modern decks out there with the same creature suite that are stronger.

#### Boomshine

[Boomshine emerged in late-2022](#), and despite being even lighter on LD, functions much more closely to SOFR & Haktos’s X-for-1 principle.

This deck’s core idea is to load up on indestructible lands (for Boom), and

then use artifact animation like Rise and Shine or Ensoul Artifact to turn those into indestructible creatures. By not running any other creatures, it blanks all damage- and destruction-based removal. This commitment to animation and the interaction-heavy midrange style does, however, mean no LD for the rest of the list.

Notably, this is the other deck (besides LIBOR and SOFR) whose development can be tied most directly to the RW Lockout Discord. It was originated by *CrayonShed*, with *wutup* and *Shimney* as key contributors.

### B. *Why not play other permanents?*

Short answer: Playing permanents besides Haktos in SOFR & Haktos has the serious downside of “turning on” the opponent’s removal spells, which essentially *eliminates that invaluable X-for-1 advantage we’ve carefully built the deck around*. And once that synergy is lost, the point in playing objectively mediocre land destruction spells kind of goes away.

The sideboard (and some *3.B. Potential Substitutions*), of course, has some exceptions. Those are the 0.1% of permanents in Modern that are surgically precise in terms dodging removal in just the right match-ups or being a pseudo-sorcery *and* having effects that are perfect for our strategy in the first place.

But for the other 99.9% of permanents, swapping them in means compromising our core value proposition. At which point *we’re better off just playing an existing midrange deck that has stronger cards overall*.

And it’s a slippery slope. Say we started with swapping in the strongest creature in Modern. But that’ll get killed every time by one of the opponent’s ten removal spells or twenty creatures (which have no other targets or attackers to stop). So we should play the second- and third-best creatures to try to get past that removal/blocking. Then, with this new combat-based plan, we need more interaction... and so on, until what’s left has no land destruction at all.

As academics, our job is expand the horizons of what’s conceptually possible, and to do that we must be disciplined with our X-for-1 thesis above all else.

### C. *Potential Substitutions*

All that said, there are a few cards that could conceivably be swapped into SOFR & Haktos without deviating too much from the core strategy. Each card here shouldn’t have a major impact on average win percentage, though some may be clear-cut improvements for specific metagames.



For each of these, it's important to think carefully about what we're taking about and make sure the gain outweighs the loss.

### Pillage

First question: could we go more than 17 land destruction spells with Pillage? Not the worst idea, as it would increase the reliability of our lockout but weaken the early game and Haktos-aggro plan (and further saturate the 3-mana slot).

Second, less consequential question: Pillage over Stone Rain? Can go either way with that. Stone Rain's easier mana very rarely makes a difference. But with Vindicate and Prismatic Ending on hand, along with the lack of problematic artifacts (Amulet, maybe Hammer/Vial) in this format, the second mode of Pillage will also be used very rarely.

### Cleansing Wildfire + Rustvale Bridge

This was in the earliest builds of SOFR & Haktos for a more reliable Turn 2 Boom and to ramp with card advantage. (The ability to Bust and have 1-3 lands left was also useful.)

However, ramping to Haktos just isn't as good as ramping to a Planeswalker (ala Nahiri Boom). PWs are better coming down earlier since they provide immediate value and are more vulnerable when there are more creatures. Haktos is better coming down later after we've destroyed some lands to improve his safety. So, with Haktos as our top-end, C-Wildfire on our own land isn't providing close to full value here.

And the versatility to use C-Wildfire on the opponent's land isn't great either. It doesn't actually destroy a land unless it's late, so we're essentially cycling for 2 at sorcery speed. In all, an underwhelming card.

As such, Cleansing Wildfire and the slightly improved Boom odds just aren't worth all those games where we miss that critical Turn 1 or 2 interaction due to tapped Bridge.

### Profane Tutor

With Haktos being such a critical card, having a fifth or sixth way to access it is worth seriously considering.

But Profane Tutor likely isn't the best way to go about it. By nature it is inefficient: it either uses up our critical Turn 2, or carries a very inconvenient delay if top-decked. As special an attacking creature as Haktos is, it's still just an attacking creature; and that alone is probably not worth going out our way to

get.

Also, with this deck being mostly 4-ofs, the flexibility of the tutoring isn't truly maximized. There's also Teferi shutting this down and the non-bo with Trinisphere.

Probably not the worst call as a 1-of, but its built-in disadvantages mean it probably won't move the needle with this deck.

### Shadow of Doubt

A very exciting card, and one of the few here that seems like it could push SOFR & Haktos to the next level of competitiveness. It's 2-mana land destruction, deals with annoying fetch-lands before our opponent can get even a single use, and provides card advantage in the expected use case (and cycles in the worst case). It adds to our LD count while not taking up as much space in the deck.

But in practice... there's just too much wrong with it. Mainly, this sorcery-centric deck is simply not designed to be holding up two mana early on without seriously compromising its own gameplan. The opponent has too many windows to hold their fetches and crack them when safe (especially if they've seen a Shadow already).

There's also the double-Black mana (on Turn 2), which does require a restructure of our manabase. With our needs for Haktos and both Red and White Turn 1 interaction, things start getting into real awkward (and painful) territory. Also, not all decks run a lot of fetchlands; and even for those that do, we're often stuck waiting with Shadow in hand instead of drawing something more useful.

The reactive play lines, strict mana requirements, and somewhat narrow scope are simply too much to overcome, even for a card that on the surface looks like a game-changer.

### Fatal Push

Push is comparable to Bolt in terms of how much it hits, but overall it doesn't work as well here. First, despite us having eight fetches and Flagstones, Revolt (to stop two-thirds of potential Haktos-blockers) isn't that reliable. Also, the inability to speed up the Haktos clock or hit PWs limits its versatility quite a bit. Finally, Black mana is slightly more awkward/painful to get early in the game.

As such, it'll never be better than Bolt. Though as a few extra copies of that effect could do a passable job.

### Thoughtseize

This is better than IoK in the SB, since control/combo decks aren't pressuring our life total. Still, for the maindeck, filling the small gap of relevant cheap cards Inquisition misses (Grief, Subtlety, Fire // Ice, Murktide) isn't worth the 2 life each time.

### Cling to Dust

Low opportunity cost and can strengthen our long game considerably, given our flood risk and accumulation of cards in our graveyard.

But by the time we've got 4 mana to spare, the critical points in the game have usually already passed. Critical points where this card did nothing but cost us one mana (in an awkward color). Plus, we'll sometimes not have a target—even after twisting away from RIP because of the non-bo.

### Invoke Calamity

Most of the time, this is casting two LD spells for five mana at instant speed, which on its own is probably maindeckable. There's also some additional utility in grabbing Bolt (or double-Bolt) or a Vindicate to get out of a Blood Moon lock.

But it's also costly, and gets shut down by the commonly-played Teferi and Endurance (both common in land-heavier decks that Invoke is good against). Taking that with its non-bo with RIP and Trinisphere, and the low floor is probably too risky for a tight list like this.

### Wildfire

The effect of dealing with the board (sparing Haktos) and multiple lands at once is everything we want. Problem is, six mana in Modern is very hard to get to in time without acceleration (i.e., it's much harder than five).

Too many games will be decided with this sitting in our hand, and in many others it's just overkill for what we need to do.

### Valakut Awakening

A key two-in-one solution to both mana-screw and mana-flood in LIBOR & Taxes, but Awakening is not as good here: since untapped lands are more important for early interaction, the third color makes a mono-Red source more costly, and this precludes cracking our fetch-lands for thinning value.

But Awakening does have interesting value as a pivot. By Turn 3, if the opponent has a threatening board position and/or seems strong on mana, we have the option to forego our Turn 3 LD and cast this to cycle our entire hand. That gives

us a good chance to cast Haktos on curve next turn and start racing instead—giving us a new path for victory. It’s an interesting concept, but most of the time the decision won’t be so cut-and-dried as to give us much marginal value.

### Rubble Reading / Roiling Terrain

With all the concentration in our 3-spot, perhaps it’s worth trying a few 4-mana land destruction spells with added effects?

The Scry 2 of Rubble Reading is useful to avoid missed turns from land draws (when in topdeck mode), and the damage from Terrain can easily speed up Haktos by a full turn. But neither effect is truly game-changing enough to be worth that extra mana—especially since it doesn’t time well with Haktos.

### Leyline of the Void / Leyline of Sanctity

The primary usage of these Leylines is to each stop a piece of the very common (and very painful) Rakdos Scam combo—either the devastating discard or the often-unstoppable Turn 1 threat, but not both.

Void could replace RIP, as it can also stop any W6 value from the start, But its near-worthless topdeck value is probably too much for us. Similarly, Sanctity could replace Trinisphere, since Burn is the only must-have Trinisphere matchup (Cascade is borderline).

Both neat alternatives, but also a little too narrow and unreliable.

### Chalice of the Void

Chalice is a nice zero-mana tool to stop Cascade decks, but is an easy magnet for removal. It has good value against decks with a lot of 1-drops, but the redundancy with Haktos’s protection caps its potential there. Plus, we’d have to do a bit too much twisting with our 1-mana core interaction to make it work.

### Fury / Solitude

Yes, these sort of break our “no other creatures” rule, but worth discussing given their Evoke use case.

Ultimately, the card disadvantage is just not good for a deck like this, where we’re already on the edge of having enough answers and LD. With our lack of card draw, Fury and Solitude hurt our mid- to long-game chances way too much. Plus, our sparse 2-drop spot means a free spell often isn’t better than the 1-mana removal we already have.

When hardcasted, these are immediate targets for removal. And we don't have room for any Ephemerate/Scam shenanigans.

### Ritual of Soot / Anger of the Gods / Deafening Clarion / Earthquake

These are the best sweepers to consider, all on different trade-off points between cost, impact, versatility, and “not killing Haktos”.

But sweepers inherently don't do enough for us. Modern creatures are so strong that an opponent only needs one or two good ones in play to have a strong board position—meaning we won't often be hitting multiple targets. Beyond that, sweepers are only a temporary answer, and they're too expensive to deal with problematic early threats.

Against decks that actually run a lot of creatures, Prison and Tabernacle are better in that remain on the board and thus don't depend on waiting for the perfect window to cast them (which may never come).

### Engineered Explosives / Hidetsugu Consumes All

These sweepers run into the same issues as the four above. Despite the versatility to hit a handful of non-creatures, the opponent isn't likely to have more than one or two things for them to hit. In which case, they're just more expensive spot removal spells.

There are some match-ups, like Hammer, where they have greater blow-out potential. But those aren't frequent enough to run cards this inefficient.

## IV. How to Play

For as straightforward as land destruction is, there are a surprising number of key decisions to be made at each stage of the game for SOFR & Haktos. Note that the statements below are all just guidelines, as the best play lines will depend a lot on specific context and opponent.

### A. Mulliganing

The key determinant of a mulligan decision is the number of lands in our opener. With hitting the third land drop being so critical, a hand of zero or one lands is pretty much an auto-mull. Even a two-land hand on the play is iffy; but it's so common that we'll typically keep it. (Post-mull, we'd usually go from three lands down to two, as the risk means less since we're already behind.)

In the blind, we'd prefer to have at least one piece of Turn 1 interaction (this includes IoK and Tithe on the play) to deal with any impactful 1-drops. We'd also like to have at least one or two land destruction spells, as putting early continuous pressure on the opponent's mana is necessary for our main gameplan.

Subject to land minimums, a Boom // Bust with Flagstones or a Haktos is normally an auto-keep. The guaranteed option to pivot to Haktos on Turn 4 and potentially win with just that, no matter what happens before, is highly valuable; and is worth going with a subpar hand otherwise.

But overall, we'd like to avoid mulliganing as much as possible. Going down a card hurts us a lot, as we're already at a card quality disadvantage, and the range of acceptable minimum lands (two) and spells (two) is already narrow enough that a hand with one less card just stresses us even more.

Fortunately, with our different LD and interaction spells being rather fungible (and our SB cards being moderate-impact), we're not dependent on any kind of combination of cards or silver bullets. So a large percentage of hands should be good enough for us to work with.

### *B. Sequencing*

#### **Early Game**

In the first two turns, we need to go all-in on interacting with the opponent's early plays, not "saving" anything since we may not have the mana to cast them in the few turns after. We obviously prefer to use cards that'll be less useful later (e.g., cast a Mana Tithe or IoK ASAP).

We want to avoid playing/fetching an untapped shock unnecessarily. but also don't want to give up any flexibility around the options in our hand for fear of losing 1-2 extra life (e.g. playing a shock tapped when we may want to cast a Tithe or Bolt on the opponent's turn)—since the cost from a missed interaction far outweighs that damage.

It's usually pretty intuitive which lands to fetch: it's all about getting to a minimum 2 Red, 2 White, and 1 Black sources. Often our colors are rich enough that we can fetch a shockland instead of the Triome (to save that future cycle). It's also good to keep a fetchland in hand if possible for a potential Boom combo.

#### **Mid- to Late-Game (no Haktos in hand)**

Without Haktos in hand, the play sequence is much more straightforward. In general, we should focus on blowing up the opponent's lands (before casting tax

spells or interaction), as that's effectively a long-term investment in that it permanently sets the opponent back on the cards they can cast.

With no idea when Haktos will be drawn, our simple goal here is lock them out as quickly as possible without dying.

Only if the opponent has a major value piece providing continuous value (e.g., Ragavan or most PWs) would we consider giving up LD for interaction; but being forced to do that already puts us behind quite a bit.

With Vindicate, try to resist wasting it on even moderate threats unless our life total is under serious danger. Keeping the opponent down on mana and counting on drawing one of our many answers (once they're compromised/locked out) is a much more likely way to win than giving up our LD turn and facing an even more serious additional threat next turn.

It's best to play naïve with our LD. Even if we expect countermagic, waiting a turn (for Mana Tithe backup, etc.) only puts us further behind—since each turn the opponent has with multiple lands is more valuable for them.

After the first few turns, always fetch if our life total is under control, as at that point the better future draw quality matters marginally while the 1 life typically doesn't matter at all.

### **Middle- to Late-Game (Haktos in hand)**

Once we have Haktos in our hand, the entire dynamic of the game changes. At this point, we need to think several turns ahead and map out the most reliable path to victory using Haktos and the rest of our hand.

In general, if the opponent doesn't have a threatening board position, it's best to keep destroying lands over casting Haktos. Each destroyed land sets them back a turn and ensures they're unlikely to land anything more serious. With no rush to land Haktos soon, it's best to wait until we know he'll be safe before casting him.

But at times it's clear that our turns are numbered before the opponent takes insurmountable control of the game or ends it outright. They can get there either by countering multiple early LD spells, getting a few Ragavan hits or Wrenn draws in, or just having a serious attacking presence. At that point, we have to throw down Haktos by default and risk the higher probability that it gets killed or countered. But even as a "last resort" option, this can still steal a win for us fairly often.

And of course, between those two extremes is the murky middle ground where

we're under a damage clock (but not a serious one) and the opponent's resources are moderate enough that destroying their lands is impacting them (but not shutting them down). There, it's important to know their deck and what their game plan might look like for the next few turns, with or without the LD and with or without Haktos. Do we want to start racing them now, or wait to next turn when Haktos is safer and they have less resources (but we'll be further behind)? Ultimately, it comes down to making a call from quickly assessing a few conditional probabilities:

- Probability that they'll have a removal spell/PW on Haktos's number and have the mana to cast it
- Probability that on our next turn they'll have more blockers for Haktos than we can remove
- Probability that they could speed up their clock by a turn and/or we could slow it down

### *C. Sideboarding*

First rule of sideboarding for SOFR & Haktos: never side out our one win condition, Haktos (with a few exceptions).

Second rule: almost never side out our core 16 land destruction spells. X-for-1 via committed LD is a key conduit to victory, so we don't want to give that up even a little. That said, Thoughts of Ruin will often come out versus a low-curve deck, since any situations where the opponent has some accumulated lands is one where we're already in a dangerous position.

Mana Tithe and Inquisition of Kozilek are both much better on the play than the draw, so there may be a total 1-3 card difference depending. Prismatic Ending is more natural on the draw and usually the one changing on the other side.

Tithe has the most consistent power level from match-up to match-up; so often that'll be the final residual decision once all the more intentional sideboarding has been done. (Though it gets a bit better versus decks with multiple high-impact 3-plus drops.) IoK is more often the odd one out unless specified, since it's the least synergistic of our cards.

### **Izzet Murktide**

- A Ragavan deck means 4 Bolts. Prismatic Ending could be cut slightly since targets aren't many and it misses Dashed Ragavan. IoK is decent here, given their cheap countermagic.



- 1-of Boil (moderate Islands), RIP (Murktide/DRC) and Gut Shot (Ragavan/sometimes DRC) are all good considerations.
- Whether to pivot to Ghostly Prison is an open question—it's a rare answer to Murktide and handles Ragavan's Dash well, but the creature count is only moderate. Its longer time horizon implies less Tithe/IoK and more Boil.

### **Rakdos Scam**

- To handle the namesake combo on the play, we can load up on Tithe and Inquisition. Can't do anything on the draw, though.
- Bolt > P-Ending, because of Ragavan and hitting the scammed/in-scam Elementals (usually). With only one target, Gut Shot probably has no place.
- Ghostly Prison is great here. It can't be removed, it can stop the big Grief/Fury, and the opponent often goes with less lands (because of their combo). Plus Ragavan Dash.
- 1-of RIP and Trinisphere are good to prevent free/Scam shenanigans in the mid- to late-game.

### **Hammer Time**

- We need maximum cheap removal here, with full Bolts (Hammer triggers and all creatures) and P-Endings (Sigarda's Aid, Springleaf Drum, Kaldra Germs).
- March is obvious for Urza's Saga, and Gut Shot to deal with Sentinel evenly (plus Memnite and Inkmoth Nexus).
- Magus of the Tabernacle comes in. Hammer doesn't tend to run removal, and there's the static Sentinel effect and Drum to blow out. It also disrupts their mana for the Hammer combo and a 2/6 can usually stop a Construct. Avoid Ghostly Prison, though, as they don't go wide on attackers.
- Obsidian Charmaw is safe, fully evasive, and often 1-2 mana cheaper thanks to Sagas and Inkmoths. With that and full Haktos, we're going all-in offense here—since Hammer can win with just one mana.

### **Burn / Prowess**

- For Burn, 2 Trinisphere is mandatory—especially to stop them topdecking lands for the last few bits of damage.
- Full removal for Goblin Guide/Swiftspear/Eidolon (and because IoK sucks here). Tithe is also a 4-of for those lethal topdecks. Not enough attackers for Prison.
- Prowess is similar, except Ghostly Prison is a no-brainer to tax out Prowess triggers.

### Yawgmoth

- They run a ton of mana dorks, so go full-on Bolt and P-Ending (and maybe Gut Shot).
- Tabernacle is massive here, because of those dorks and Undying creatures that are harder to deal with otherwise. It's only a magnet for Grist, but the creature tax could give us a window to kill the PW first. Charmaw is a maybe for Haktos, who can be more easily killed.
- RIP is nice but not necessary to stop Undying synergies.

### Creativity

- To stop them getting to 4 mana, load up on LD: including Charmaw (Binding with multiple lands is the only removal), and Boil if there's even a semblance of Blue.
- They run so many ETB permanents (W6, Teferi, Fable) that prevention > removal. Full Tithe and IoK here, with the latter also key for their Spell Pierces/Flusterstorms. RIP is important to stop W6 and any reanimation options.
- Between all that, we have to cut down a lot on removal. P-Ending over Bolt since it can remove PWs, though it's close because of the possible instant-speed Creativity counter.

### Living End

- The 3-mana Cascade is a guaranteed “we’re dead” point (esp. since Living End kills Haktos). Between Grief and Architects (and cheap enchantment removal), there's no point even trying to hold them off after that with Ghostly Prison.

- We'd rather just go all-in our LD again. Boil hits a ton and Charmaw is that important dual clock + LD tempo piece that can't be killed normally.
- RIP and Trinisphere stops their combo, despite some weakness to Foundation Breaker/Force of Vigor. IoK is also key to taking out their problematic Force of Negations or buying some time (by discarding Cascaders).
- Bolt and P-Ending do nothing here, so they're easily gone.

### **Rhinos**

- The 3-mana Cascade is less of a death-knell here, so we can be more balanced. We want Boil for all their Islands, but Charmaw is a big-time Fury magnet.
- Trinisphere does stop the Cascading, but their artifact removal/bounce spells and other 3-mana options (Bonecrusher Giant, Brazen Borrower) makes it less automatic.
- IoK's value on the play is much greater here, since Suspending Rhinos is their only Turn 1 play. It's alright otherwise, hitting FoN/Cascaders but missing the key Fire // Ice.
- We should have enough room for 4-5 P-Ending/March, so that we can reasonably race a pair of Rhinos with Haktos (or even remove both).

### **4/5-color Omnath / Elementals / Scapeshift**

- There are many variants of this archetype, but the core is always W6, Teferi, Omnath, a lot of lands, and (luckily for us) a ton of cheap/free removal spells that all miss Haktos.
- Boil hits those Islands, but Charmaw is a magnet for all those removal spells. Counterspells and W6 means IoK is great. W6 also necessitates RIP.
- With the higher mana curve, we can work with less interaction here (unless we see Ragavan), keeping P-Ending over Bolt for the PWs.

### **Tribal (Merfolk, Humans/Goblins/Elves, etc.)**

- For all these decks, we want to pivot to traditional LIBOR & Taxes. Full Prison, Tabernacle, and Charmaw, while cutting half of our Haktos.

- Tithe is much worse here due to Cavern of Souls, and P-Ending is great for Vial. Bolt is okay for handling the early game.
- Merfolk is the most common and warrants 1-2 Boil. Gut Shot might come in versus a few (Humans, Elves).

## **Mill**

- Keep full/close-to-full Bolts and Endings for just the Crabs.
- Surgical on Haktos in Game 1 is game over. Thus, double RIP (also shuts down Drown in the Loch and Visions from Beyond) and double Charmaw (helped by Field of Ruins) post-board.
- Trinisphere is decent because of Archive Trap and their low curve.

## **Amulet Titan**

- The biggest danger is Amulet of Vigor (and a second one via Gardens) allowing them to bypass our LD via bouncelands. That makes P-Ending and March the most important cards here.
- We may want to have a few Bolts to handle Azusa cheaply, while IoK is especially good on the play to discard a Turn 1 Amulet.
- Obviously, we need to maximize our LD. Boil blows out Dryad (though not seeing it or Valakut should give us pause), and Obsidian Charmaw is excellent—especially with a third of their lands being cost-reducers.

## **Azorius / Jeskai Control**

- IoK and Boil are the MVPs: to get rid of their critical counters, and wipe out their Islands at just the right moment.
- There's still room for Bolt and P-Ending, which are close to even here. P-Ending is good versus Chalice and reliably removes Teferi, while Bolt provides important reach while killing Solitude.

## **G-Tron / E-Tron / U-Tron**

- Charmaw is insanely good here. Otherwise, Bolt can kill a Karn that tries the Liquimetal combo (and helps with reach since Tron doesn't damage itself), Ending/March removes several pieces, and IoK can take out Warping Wail—some balance of those three should work.

- For E-Tron, between Chalice and their many hard-to-remove creatures, we should swap out several 1-drops (mainly Bolt) for Prison/Tabernacle. For U-Tron and their countermagic, we should side in some Boils.

### **Jund / Jeskai Breach / Death's Shadow / Domain Zoo**

- These are all Ragavan midrange variants, and thus we follow the same strategy (as Murktide and Scam) of loading up on cheap removal.
- For Jund, get IoK and RIP and W6. Breach warrants a full RIP response. Prison is great for the more attacking-focused Shadow (P-Ending also for Shadow itself), but less so for Zoo because of Binding.

### **Affinity**

- The indestructible artifact lands preclude any kind of sustained lockdown, so we'll actually want to side out some or all Stone Rains.
- As we pivot to an all-out offense, Charmaw is highly efficient (Saga, Citadel, Treasure Vault) while Tabernacle taxes all their mana-reducing creatures and Drum.
- Beyond the obvious March, Ending > Bolt due to its versatility, though Bolt is still decent as effectively a 1-mana LD.

### **Hardened Scales**

- Same Prison/Tabernacle/Charmaw pivot given their many larger creatures. Haktos is still good here, though, since so many have 0 or 1 mana value. P-Ending is the removal of choice given Modular.

### **Infect / Bogles**

- For Infect, go all-in on cheap interaction, while Prison is great to stop pump spells. For Bogles, go all in on Prison/Tabernacle and have IoK/Tithe on the play to stop Bogles. Trinisphere is great versus both low-curve decks.

### **Dredge / Crabvine**

- Since these graveyard decks are cheating in a ton of creatures at once, the Prison/Tabernacle/Charmaw pivot applies here (while Haktos gets blocked easily). Along with the extremely obvious RIP. Bolt and P-Ending do nothing versus Dredge, but have value versus Crabs.

## V. Closing Remarks

So there you have it! Everything you need to know about Land Destruction, the most underplayed (probably my opinion) and interesting (definitely my opinion) deck archetype in Modern.

Being borderline Tier 3 in the two years of post-MH2 Modern, this is definitely not the deck to play if your goal is to maximize your MTGO payout or expect to win a Modern RCQ. What makes it special is its ability to have some success by playing a style that's so: (1) distinct from anything else in Modern, and (2) unabashedly committed on a mechanic that's been (unfairly) dismissed by most everyone in the format.

At the very least, it makes for an exciting academic conclusion, while being an important building block for the diversity of the format.

And at the very most... who knows? The limitless potential of the X-for-1 principle means that any meta shift or new printing could cause this type of deck to make a major jump in competitiveness overnight.

And we might not have to wait too long to see that happen. The upcoming Lord of the Rings set has already revealed Reprieve, an objectively powerful card that fits this deck's strategy almost perfectly. And just that alone could be the piece that pushes Land Destruction over the edge.

In closing, LIBOR and land destruction will never die. Because no matter who tries to kill it, there's something special about the concept that ensures it'll always carry on in some form (SOFR). Whether it's Lands In Battlefield Over-Rated or Salt Over Forgone Resources, there's no end to what we can learn by viewing this wondrous *Magic: The Gathering* game through the unique lens of an academic!