# A Royal Flush: A Strategic Deep Dive into the Face Card Archetype

## Section 1: The Royal Court - Core Monster Analysis

The "Face Card" archetype, also known as the "Three Musketeers of Face Cards," is a strategy built around a core of LIGHT Warrior monsters reminiscent of a royal flush in poker.1 The deck's primary game plan is to rapidly assemble its key monsters on the field to enable powerful Tribute, Fusion, Xyz, or Link Summons. Understanding the specific role of each monster is fundamental to mastering the deck's intricate lines of play.

### 1.1 The Foundational Trio: The "Three Musketeers of Face Cards"

At the heart of the strategy lies a trio of monsters whose synergy forms the bedrock of every combo: Queen's Knight, King's Knight, and Jack's Knight.1

* **Queen's Knight**: A Level 4 LIGHT Warrior Normal Monster with 1500 ATK and 1600 DEF.3 As a Normal Monster, it is the designated starting point for the archetype's signature combo and is compatible with generic support like Unexpected Dai.4
* **King's Knight**: A Level 4 LIGHT Warrior Effect Monster with 1600 ATK and 1400 DEF.3 Its effect is the central engine of the trio: when King's Knight is Normal Summoned while you control Queen's Knight, you can Special Summon one Jack's Knight from your Deck.3
* **Jack's Knight**: A Level 5 LIGHT Warrior Normal Monster with 1900 ATK and 1000 DEF.3 It is the payoff for the King's Knight effect, completing the on-field assembly of the three monsters.

This classic, sequential interaction is the archetype's primary method of generating board presence. A single Normal Summon of King's Knight under the right condition results in a net gain of one monster on the field, transforming a two-monster setup into a three-monster board ready for more ambitious plays.

The design of these core monsters reveals a deliberate construction that facilitates broader synergies. All three are LIGHT Warriors, making them searchable by the generic staple Reinforcement of the Army and compatible with a vast pool of LIGHT Warrior Extra Deck monsters, particularly those from the "Utopia" and "Noble Knight" archetypes.4 The specific levels are also critical; the presence of two Level 4 monsters (Queen's Knight and King's Knight) provides an immediate and natural pathway to Rank 4 Xyz Summons. The Level 5 Jack's Knight introduces a slight variance that modern support cards are specifically designed to accommodate and exploit. This foundational design ensures the archetype is not only self-sufficient through its core interaction but also highly receptive to external support, pre-ordaining its role as a flexible engine.

### 1.2 The Ace in the Hole: Joker's Knight

Joker's Knight is the modern lynchpin that provides the deck with much-needed consistency and recovery. This Level 5 LIGHT Warrior Effect Monster has two critical effects 3:

1. It can Special Summon itself from the hand by sending one Queen's Knight, King's Knight, or Jack's Knight from the Deck to the Graveyard. Upon doing so, Joker's Knight's name becomes the name of the sent monster until the End Phase.
2. During the End Phase, if it is in the Graveyard, it can be added back to the hand by shuffling another LIGHT Warrior monster from the Graveyard into the Deck.

This card is the ultimate problem-solver. It acts as a stand-in for any missing piece of the trio, effectively increasing the virtual count of each Knight in the deck. If an opening hand lacks Queen's Knight, Joker's Knight can send it from the Deck to the GY and assume its name, enabling King's Knight's effect.5 This name-changing ability is the glue that binds the deck's modern combos, ensuring the core interaction can be initiated even with imperfect hands.

Furthermore, its recursion effect is not merely for resource advantage in a prolonged duel; it is a core mechanic that enables one of the deck's most powerful variants. Strategies involving Slifer the Sky Dragon require a large hand size to maximize the divine beast's ATK, which is calculated as $1000 \times$ the number of cards in hand.8 The process of summoning the three Knights as tribute fodder naturally depletes the hand. The End Phase recursion of Joker's Knight, along with its Spell/Trap counterparts Joker's Straight and Joker's Wild, directly counteracts this drawback. These cards return to the hand at the end of the turn, refilling the player's resources and ensuring that a freshly summoned Slifer becomes a formidable threat with high ATK.5 This design transforms the Slifer variant from a nostalgic gimmick into a coherent and synergistic strategy.

### 1.3 The Unseen Hand: Imperial Bower

Imperial Bower serves as the deck's alternative one-card starter. This Level 4 LIGHT Warrior has a simple but powerful effect: if you control no other monsters, you can Tribute it to take two different monsters from among the foundational trio from your Deck and either add them to your hand or Special Summon them.3

While Joker's Straight is often the preferred starter due to its ability to assemble all three Knights, Imperial Bower offers a distinct advantage. Its activation does not lock the player into summoning only LIGHT Warrior monsters from the Extra Deck for the rest of the turn.3 This makes Imperial Bower the premier opening play for combo-intensive variants that rely on non-LIGHT Warrior Extra Deck monsters, most notably Isolde, Two Tales of the Noble Knights, a DARK Warrior Link Monster that is central to many advanced Warrior strategies.6

### 1.4 The Final Trump Card: Arcana Triumph Joker

Arcana Triumph Joker is the archetype's dedicated in-house boss monster and primary win condition.1 This Level 10 LIGHT Warrior cannot be Normal Summoned or Set but has a powerful method of entering the fray 10:

* It can be Special Summoned from the hand or Graveyard by sending one Queen's Knight, King's Knight, and Jack's Knight from the hand and/or face-up Monster Zone to the Graveyard.

Once on the field, it boasts two game-altering effects 3:

1. It gains 500 ATK for each card in both players' hands combined. This is a continuous effect, meaning its ATK fluctuates in real-time as hand sizes change.14
2. It has a non-once-per-turn ignition effect: you can discard one card to destroy all face-up cards your opponent controls that share the same card type (Monster, Spell, or Trap) as the discarded card.

This monster is the ultimate payoff for assembling the trio. Its ATK scaling synergizes perfectly with the hand-maintenance strategy that benefits Slifer the Sky Dragon. However, its most devastating feature is the repeatable board wipe. A player with several cards in hand can, for instance, discard a monster to destroy all of the opponent's monsters, then discard a Spell to destroy all of their face-up Spells, and finally discard a Trap to clear their face-up Traps.14 This ability to systematically dismantle an opponent's board makes Arcana Triumph Joker an exceptional tool for breaking established fields and securing a decisive victory.

## Section 2: The Royal Decree - Archetypal Spells & Traps

While the monsters form the court, the archetype's Spells and Traps are the decrees that set the entire strategy in motion. These support cards provide the consistency, speed, and flexibility required to compete in the modern game.

### 2.1 The Premier Starter: Joker's Straight

Joker's Straight is arguably the most powerful and important card in the entire archetype.5 This Normal Spell is a true one-card combo starter, capable of assembling the full trio on its own. Its effect is multifaceted 3:

* **Cost:** Discard 1 card.
* **Effect 1:** Special Summon 1 Queen's Knight from your Deck.
* **Effect 2:** Add 1 King's Knight or Jack's Knight from your Deck to your hand.
* **Effect 3:** Immediately after this effect resolves, you can Normal Summon 1 monster.
* **Restriction:** For the rest of this turn, you cannot Special Summon monsters from the Extra Deck, except LIGHT Warrior monsters.8
* **Recursion:** During the End Phase, if this card is in your GY, you can target 1 LIGHT Warrior monster in your GY, shuffle it into the Deck, and add this card back to your hand.

The standard line of play with Joker's Straight is to discard a card, Special Summon Queen's Knight, add King's Knight to hand, and then use the granted additional Normal Summon on that King's Knight. With Queen's Knight now on the field, King's Knight's own effect will trigger, Special Summoning Jack's Knight from the Deck.5 The LIGHT Warrior Extra Deck lock is a significant but manageable restriction that guides deck-building towards specific packages, such as the "Utopia" Xyz monsters.6

### 2.2 The Fusion Enabler: Face Card Fusion

Face Card Fusion is the dedicated fusion spell for the archetype, designed to summon its powerful LIGHT Warrior Fusion Monsters with maximum efficiency.16 Its effect is simple but potent 3:

* Fusion Summon 1 LIGHT Warrior Fusion Monster from your Extra Deck, using monsters from your hand or field as Fusion Material.
* If you control Queen's Knight, King's Knight, or Jack's Knight, you can use 1 monster from your Deck as Fusion Material.

This second clause is what makes the card so powerful. After resolving a Joker's Straight to establish the trio on the field, Face Card Fusion can use one of the on-field Knights and send the other two required materials directly from the Deck to the Graveyard. This turns it into a highly efficient one-card Fusion Summon for monsters like Arcana Knight Joker, circumventing the need to draw into multiple high-level Normal Monsters.3

### 2.3 The Reactive Toolbox: Joker's Wild

Joker's Wild is a Normal Trap that provides immense flexibility, acting as a searchable and recyclable copy of the deck's most powerful Spells.3 Its effects are 3:

* During the Main or Battle Phase: Send 1 Spell from your Deck to the GY that specifically lists all of "Queen's Knight", "King's Knight", and "Jack's Knight"; this effect becomes that Spell's effect when that card is activated.
* It also possesses the standard End Phase recursion effect, allowing it to return to the hand from the Graveyard.

This card functions as additional copies of Joker's Straight, Face Card Fusion, or Royal Straight, depending on the situation. It can be used defensively on the opponent's turn to summon the trio via Joker's Straight's effect, or offensively during the Battle Phase to bring out a Fusion Monster. Its versatility is its greatest asset, and it synergizes well with cards like Trap Trick, which can set Joker's Wild directly from the Deck, providing highly consistent access to the deck's core plays.4

### 2.4 Utility and Grind Game: Court of Cards & Royal Straight

These two cards provide the deck with tools for longer, more resource-intensive games.

* **Court of Cards**: A Continuous Trap that offers two effects, only one of which can be used per turn. It can either Special Summon one of the Knights from the hand or Graveyard, or it can banish up to one of each Knight from the hand or Graveyard to draw an equivalent number of cards.3 This provides valuable recovery and card advantage over multiple turns.
* **Royal Straight**: A Quick-Play Spell that serves as a fast track to a boss monster. By sending the trio from the hand or face-up field to the Graveyard, it can Special Summon any monster from the hand, Deck, Extra Deck, or Graveyard that specifically mentions all three Knights.3 This is often used to summon Arcana Triumph Joker or Royal Straight Slasher at a critical moment.

## Section 3: The Art of the Deal - Core Combos and Board States

Mastery of the Face Card archetype requires a procedural understanding of its core combos. These sequences are the foundation upon which the deck's various strategies are built. The following breakdowns are designed to be clear and easily visualized.

### 3.1 The Foundational Play: Assembling the Three Musketeers via Joker's Straight

This is the deck's most fundamental and crucial combo, turning a single spell card into a full board of three monsters.

* **Procedure:**
  1. **Start:** Hand contains Joker's Straight + 1 discard fodder.
  2. **Action:** Activate Joker's Straight. Discard 1 card from hand.
  3. **Resolution 1:** Special Summon Queen's Knight from the Deck.
  4. **Resolution 2:** Add King's Knight from the Deck to the hand.
  5. **Resolution 3:** An additional Normal Summon is granted for the turn.
  6. **Action:** Use the additional Normal Summon to play King's Knight from the hand.
  7. **Trigger:** As King's Knight was Normal Summoned while Queen's Knight is on the field, its effect activates.
  8. **Resolution:** Special Summon Jack's Knight from the Deck.
* **End Board:** Queen's Knight (Level 4), King's Knight (Level 4), and Jack's Knight (Level 5) are all face-up on the field. The player's standard Normal Summon for the turn has not been used. This board is now primed for a Tribute Summon, Link Summon, or Xyz Summon.

The efficiency of this play is its greatest strength. A quantitative analysis reveals the card advantage it generates.

| **Action** | **Card Cost (Hand)** | **Cards Gained (Field)** | **Cards Gained (Hand)** | **Net Change** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Activate Joker's Straight | -2 (itself + discard) | +1 (Queen's Knight) | +1 (King's Knight) | 0 |
| Normal Summon King's Knight | -1 (King's Knight) | +1 (King's Knight) | 0 | 0 |
| King's Knight Effect | 0 | +1 (Jack's Knight) | 0 | +1 |
| **Total** | **-3** | **+3** | **0** | **Net +1 Monster on Field** |

As the table illustrates, a two-card investment from the hand results in three monsters on the field, a net gain of one monster in terms of board presence, all without consuming the turn's primary Normal Summon. This powerful opening is the reason Joker's Straight is central to the deck's strategy.6

### 3.2 The Fusion & Link Gambits

Once the trio is assembled, the player can immediately pivot into summoning a powerful Extra Deck monster.

* **Fusion Path:** Following the Joker's Straight combo, activate Face Card Fusion. By its effect, you can use one monster on the field (e.g., Queen's Knight) and send the other two required materials (King's Knight and Jack's Knight) directly from the Deck to the Graveyard. This efficiently Fusion Summons Arcana Knight Joker, a 3800 ATK monster with built-in protection against targeting effects.3
* **Link Path:** Alternatively, the three on-field Knights can be used as material for a Link Summon. The in-archetype option is Arcana Extra Joker, a LINK-3 monster that can negate targeting effects by discarding a card of the same type.3 A powerful generic alternative is Black Luster Soldier - Soldier of Chaos, a formidable LINK-3 boss monster.9

### 3.3 The Finishing Hand: Unleashing Arcana Triumph Joker

Summoning the main deck boss monster is a straightforward but powerful play designed to end the game.

* **Procedure:**
  1. Assemble Queen's Knight, King's Knight, and Jack's Knight on the field and/or in the hand.
  2. Activate the effect of Arcana Triumph Joker from the hand or Graveyard.
  3. Send the three required Knights from your hand/field to the Graveyard.
  4. Special Summon Arcana Triumph Joker.

This play is most effective when used to break an opponent's established board. With a substantial number of cards in hand, Arcana Triumph Joker can be summoned with massive ATK and then proceed to wipe the opponent's field of monsters, spells, and traps before the Battle Phase even begins, clearing the path for a game-ending attack.1

## Section 4: Forging Alliances - Strategic Variants and External Synergies

The true strength of the Face Card archetype lies in its remarkable flexibility. The core engine of assembling the "Three Musketeers" is not just an end in itself, but a means to enable a variety of powerful strategies and win conditions by integrating with other archetypes and support cards.

### 4.1 The Divine Alliance: The Slifer the Sky Dragon Build

This is the most iconic and thematically resonant variant of the deck, recreating Yugi Muto's signature strategy from the original series.1

* **Core Strategy:** The primary goal is to use the assembled trio of Knights as the three required tributes for the Normal Summon of Slifer the Sky Dragon.4 The win condition then becomes controlling the game with Slifer's powerful effects: its ATK is determined by the player's hand size, and it automatically reduces the ATK of any monster the opponent summons by 2000.
* **Key Support Cards:** This build relies on a suite of Egyptian God support cards. Thunderspeed Summon is a Quick-Play Spell that grants an extra Normal Summon for a Level 10 monster and can search a God Card if the trio is on the field.4 Soul Crossing allows the player to use the opponent's monsters as tribute material, and The Revived Sky God is a potent Trap Card that can generate massive card draw and provides recursion for Slifer.4
* **Synergistic Function:** This strategy is fundamentally enabled by the design of the "Joker" support cards. As previously noted, the act of summoning tribute fodder depletes the hand, which would normally render Slifer weak. However, the End Phase recursion effects of Joker's Knight, Joker's Straight, and Joker's Wild are specifically designed to counteract this. They allow the player to commit resources to the board to summon Slifer, then immediately replenish their hand to power it up to formidable ATK values, creating a self-sustaining engine of divine power.5

### 4.2 The Noble Alliance: The Isolde & Warrior Combo Build

This variant elevates the deck's competitive ceiling by transforming the Face Card engine into a delivery system for a far more complex and resilient combo strategy.

* **Core Strategy:** The goal is to summon any two Warrior monsters to the field, typically using Imperial Bower to avoid the LIGHT-only restriction of Joker's Straight.6 These two Warriors are then used to Link Summon Isolde, Two Tales of the Noble Knights.21 Isolde becomes the central combo piece, using its effects to search for other Warrior monsters and Special Summon key tuners or extenders from the Deck by sending Equip Spells to the Graveyard.23
* **Sample Combo Outline:**
  1. Summon two Warriors (e.g., via Imperial Bower or Unexpected Dai + a Normal Summon).
  2. Link Summon Isolde, Two Tales of the Noble Knights.
  3. Activate Isolde's first effect to add a Warrior extender to the hand.
  4. Activate Isolde's second effect, sending Equip Spells (e.g., Divine Sword - Phoenix Blade) to the Graveyard to Special Summon a Warrior like Infernoble Knight - Renaud.6
  5. Renaud's effect triggers, adding an Equip Spell back to the hand.
  6. From this point, the combo can branch into numerous lines involving Synchro Summons, further Link climbing, and establishing a final board with multiple monster negates and disruptions.
* **The Archetype as a "Trojan Horse":** In this build, the Face Card monsters are no longer the main focus. Their purpose shifts to being the most efficient method of placing two Warriors on the field to summon Isolde. The deck presents the appearance of a straightforward beatdown strategy, but it is actually a "Trojan Horse" delivering a much more powerful and non-linear Warrior combo engine. This strategic pivot allows the deck to build boards that are far more resilient to disruption than what the pure Face Card strategy can achieve on its own.23

### 4.3 The Utopic Alliance: The Rank 4 Xyz & OTK Build

This variant embraces the restriction imposed by Joker's Straight and channels it into a highly focused and aggressive game plan.

* **Core Strategy:** After using Joker's Straight to summon the trio, the player is locked into Special Summoning LIGHT Warrior monsters from the Extra Deck.6 This build leverages that restriction by using the two Level 4 monsters, Queen's Knight and King's Knight, to Xyz Summon a powerful Rank 4 LIGHT Warrior.
* **Key Extra Deck Monsters:** The primary targets are from the "Utopia" archetype. Number 39: Utopia can be summoned and then ranked up into Number S39: Utopia the Lightning, a monster capable of reaching 5000 ATK and preventing the opponent from activating effects during the Battle Phase, making it a premier tool for One-Turn Kills (OTKs).4 Number 39: Utopia Double provides another route to an OTK by searching a "Double or Nothing!" spell card.6 For a more control-oriented approach, Constellar Pleiades offers a valuable quick-effect bounce to disrupt the opponent's plays.1
* **Synergistic Function:** This build represents the most direct and explosive application of the core engine. It forgoes the intricate setup of the Isolde variant and the slower, more controlling pace of the Slifer build in favor of a straightforward, aggressive push for game. It is a testament to the archetype's flexibility that its primary starter's restriction can be turned into a focused and potent win condition.

## Section 5: The State of the Kingdom - Strategic Analysis and Deck Construction

A holistic assessment of the Face Card archetype reveals a potent but flawed strategy. Its high potential is balanced by clear vulnerabilities, making deck construction and tactical awareness paramount to success.

### 5.1 Strengths, Weaknesses, and Choke Points

* **Strengths:** The deck possesses a high ceiling for generating board presence from a single card. Its engine is remarkably flexible, capable of pivoting between OTK, combo, and control strategies. The inherent recursion in the "Joker" cards provides a strong resource loop for longer games.1
* **Weaknesses:** The strategy is extremely fragile and vulnerable to common forms of disruption, particularly "hand traps" like Ash Blossom & Joyous Spring or Effect Veiler.4 A single negation on a key starter like Joker's Straight or on the effect of King's Knight can often end the turn prematurely. The deck can also suffer from consistency issues, as it relies on drawing one of a few key starter cards and must run several "brick" cards (Normal Monsters, Equip Spells) to make its combos function.26
* **Overall Assessment:** The Face Card archetype is best classified as a powerful "rogue" strategy.27 It has the explosive potential to overwhelm an unprepared opponent, but its clear and easily exploitable choke points prevent it from consistently competing at the highest tiers of play. Success with the deck requires a deep understanding of its lines of play and the ability to anticipate and navigate an opponent's disruption.

### 5.2 Deck Construction Principles

Building a successful Face Card deck involves balancing the core engine with a chosen variant package and a suite of generic support cards.

* **The Core Engine:** Most builds will run maximum copies of the key starters: 3 Joker's Straight and 3 Joker's Knight. The number of Imperial Bower can range from 2-3 depending on the focus. The original trio ratios are typically 2-3 Queen's Knight, 3 King's Knight, and 2 Jack's Knight to ensure targets are always available in the deck.4
* **Variant Packages:**
  + **Slifer Build:** Includes 1-2 Slifer the Sky Dragon, along with 2-3 copies of Thunderspeed Summon, Soul Crossing, and The Revived Sky God.4
  + **Isolde Build:** Requires a small package of Equip Spells (e.g., 1 Divine Sword - Phoenix Blade, 1 Living Fossil) and key Warrior extenders like Infernoble Knight - Renaud and Fire Flint Lady.6
  + **Utopia Build:** Focuses almost entirely on the Extra Deck, including multiple copies of Number 39: Utopia and its various forms (Double, Lightning, Prime).4
* **Generic Support & Tech Choices:** Reinforcement of the Army is a mandatory one-of for searching any core Warrior.4 To protect combos from hand traps, cards like Called by the Grave are essential. For consistency, draw spells like Pot of Extravagance or Pot of Desires can be effective, though care must be taken not to banish crucial combo pieces.4

The choice of starter card often dictates the entire course of a turn, showcasing the deck's strategic depth. The following table provides a visual guide to these decision-making pathways.

| **Starting Hand** | **Path 1: Slifer Endboard** | **Path 2: Utopia OTK** | **Path 3: Isolde Combo Endboard** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Imperial Bower + King's Knight | 1. Tribute Bower, SS Queen/Jack. 2. NS King, SS other Knight. 3. Tribute all 3 for Slifer. | 1. Tribute Bower, SS Queen/Jack. 2. NS King, SS other Knight. 3. Xyz Queen+King for Utopia. 4. Rank-Up into Utopia Lightning. | 1. NS King. 2. Tribute Bower, SS Queen/Jack. 3. Link King+Queen for Isolde. 4. Begin combo... |
| Joker's Straight + Discard | 1. Activate Straight, get trio. 2. Activate Thunderspeed Summon. 3. Tribute trio for Slifer. | 1. Activate Straight, get trio. 2. Xyz Queen+King for Utopia. 3. Rank-Up into Utopia Lightning for OTK. | *Not possible due to LIGHT Warrior lock from Joker's Straight.* |

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