# The X-Saber Doctrine: A Strategic Deep Dive into Swarm, Synchro, and Hand Control

## Section I: Archetype Overview - The Mercenary Creed

The X-Saber archetype stands as a significant pillar in the history of the Yu-Gi-Oh! Trading Card Game, representing a powerful and aggressive Synchro-based strategy from the 5D's era. Comprised primarily of EARTH-attribute Warrior and Beast-Warrior monsters, the X-Sabers originate from the game's extensive Duel Terminal lore, where they are depicted as a formidable mercenary tribe.1 During their competitive peak, particularly in legacy formats such as the Edison Format, X-Sabers were a dominant, top-tier force, celebrated for their explosive combo potential and board-swarming capabilities.3

The core strategic identity of the X-Saber archetype is defined by a compelling duality. At its surface, it is a relentless beatdown and board-control deck that leverages a flurry of Special Summons to quickly assemble powerful Synchro Monsters.5 These monsters, such as the backrow-clearing XX-Saber Hyunlei, allow the deck to dismantle an opponent's defenses before pressing for a decisive victory. However, lurking beneath this aggressive facade is a far more sinister and potent strategy: one of the game's most notorious hand-control loops. This strategy revolves around the archetype's ultimate boss monster, XX-Saber Gottoms, whose effect can be repeated to systematically discard every card from the opponent's hand, effectively ending the game before the opponent has a chance to play.2 This choice—between overwhelming the field with monsters or dismantling the opponent's hand—forms the central strategic axis upon which all X-Saber gameplay revolves.

Over time, the archetype has seen its competitive standing shift. Once a powerhouse that necessitated emergency nerfs to its key components, X-Sabers have been largely outpaced by the modern game's speed and resilience, relegating them to a "rogue" or "retro" status.2 Their journey highlights the impact of power creep, as their once-unstoppable combos are now vulnerable to common forms of disruption.8 Despite this, the fundamental engine remains incredibly potent, and understanding its mechanics is key to appreciating a pivotal moment in the game's evolution.

A deeper analysis of the archetype's design reveals that its gameplay is not built on linear, single-card combos, but rather on achieving a "critical mass" of monsters on the field. The entire deck is engineered to meet a single, crucial condition: controlling two or more "X-Saber" monsters. This state acts as a universal trigger for the archetype's most powerful card, XX-Saber Faultroll, whose arrival on the field marks an exponential increase in the deck's power level. The deck's early game is a focused effort to meet this condition using cards like XX-Saber Boggart Knight, which turns a single Normal Summon into two monsters on the field.9 Once this threshold is met, the strategy shifts to a second stage: exploiting this critical mass with Faultroll's powerful revival effect to fuel Synchro Summons and enable the devastating hand loop of XX-Saber Gottoms.10 This two-stage design philosophy—first achieving, then exploiting, a specific board state—is the foundational principle of X-Saber strategy.

## Section II: The X-Saber Arsenal: A Functional Analysis of Key Assets

To master the X-Saber archetype, one must understand the specific role each card plays within its intricate engine. The cards can be functionally categorized into starters, extenders, searchers, boss monsters, and tactical support, each contributing to the overarching goal of achieving and exploiting critical mass on the field.

### A. Combo Starters and Enablers

The primary role of a starter is to establish the initial board presence required to begin combo sequences. In this deck, that responsibility falls almost entirely on **XX-Saber Boggart Knight**. As the deck's premier Normal Summon, its effect allows the player to immediately Special Summon one Level 4 or lower "X-Saber" monster from their hand. This single action fulfills the summoning condition for XX-Saber Faultroll, making Boggart Knight the most direct and essential starter in the archetype's arsenal.5

### B. Combo Extenders and Recursion Engines

Once the initial board is established, extenders are used to expand it further. The undisputed heart of the archetype is **XX-Saber Faultroll**. This Level 6 monster cannot be Normal Summoned but can be easily Special Summoned from the hand once two X-Sabers are on the field. Its effect, which allows the player to Special Summon a Level 4 or lower X-Saber from the Graveyard once per turn, is the engine that drives every major combo. Crucially, this effect is not a "hard once per turn," meaning if a player can summon multiple copies of Faultroll, each can use its revival effect, leading to overwhelming board states.4

This recursion is further supported by powerful Spell and Trap cards. **Gottoms' Emergency Call** is a Normal Trap that Special Summons two "X-Saber" monsters from *either player's* Graveyard. Its trap-speed activation and ability to use the opponent's resources make it a versatile tool for both extending combos on one's own turn and disrupting the opponent's plays on theirs.4 **Gottoms' Second Call** is a Normal Spell with a similar effect, reviving two X-Sabers from the player's Graveyard. However, it requires an X-Saber Synchro monster to be on the field, making it less of a starter and more of a mid-combo power play to facilitate the final push or the hand loop.9

### C. Searchers and Consistency Tools

Consistency is maintained through a suite of searchers that ensure key combo pieces are accessible. **XX-Saber Darksoul** is the main monster searcher. When sent from the field to the Graveyard, its effect triggers during the End Phase to add any "X-Saber" monster from the Deck to the hand. While slow, its lack of a Level restriction is vital, as it is one of the only in-archetype methods to search for the indispensable XX-Saber Faultroll.5 For more immediate board presence, **XX-Saber Emmersblade** acts as a classic battle recruiter; when destroyed by battle, it Special Summons a Level 4 or lower X-Saber directly from the Deck, thinning the deck and maintaining field presence.4 The archetype's backrow is searchable via **Saber Reflection**, a Quick-Play Spell that allows the player to add a "Saber" Spell/Trap or "Gottoms" card from the Deck to the hand after taking damage.9

### D. The Commanders: Boss Monsters and Win Conditions

The Extra Deck houses the archetype's primary win conditions. The ultimate boss is **XX-Saber Gottoms**, a Level 9 Synchro Monster. Its power lies in its non-hard-once-per-turn effect: by Tributing another "X-Saber" monster, it forces the opponent to discard one random card from their hand. When combined with the recursive power of Faultroll, this effect becomes the centerpiece of the deck's infamous hand-annihilation strategy.4 For more direct board control, **XX-Saber Hyunlei** is a Level 6 Synchro that can destroy up to three Spell and Trap cards upon being summoned, making it the primary tool for breaking an opponent's established defenses.5 Acting as a bridge between plays is **X-Saber Wayne**, a Level 5 Synchro that Special Summons a Level 4 or lower Warrior from the hand, extending combos and helping to build the board necessary for larger Synchro Summons.9

### E. Tactical Support and Tuners

The deck's Synchro plays are enabled by a small but effective group of Tuner monsters. **XX-Saber Fulhelmknight** is a versatile Level 3 Tuner that can negate an opponent's attack once and can revive an X-Saber from the Graveyard if it destroys a defense position monster by battle.4 For a more resilient option, **X-Saber Pashuul**, a Level 2 Tuner, cannot be destroyed by battle, ensuring it remains on the field as material for a Synchro Summon.9 Defensively, the archetype relies on **Saber Hole**, a powerful Counter Trap that negates the summon of an opponent's monster and destroys it, provided the player controls an X-Saber monster.6

### Table 2.1: X-Saber Card Functional Role Matrix

| Card Name | Card Type | Primary Role | Key Capabilities & Synergies |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **XX-Saber Boggart Knight** | Effect Monster | Combo Starter | Normal Summon effect Special Summons a Lvl 4 or lower X-Saber from hand. This is the primary method to establish the 2+ monsters needed for Faultroll. 9 |
| **XX-Saber Faultroll** | Effect Monster | Combo Extender | The core engine. Special Summons itself from hand with 2+ X-Sabers on field. Revives a Lvl 4 or lower X-Saber from GY. This effect is not HOPT, enabling loops. 4 |
| **XX-Saber Darksoul** | Effect Monster | Searcher | When sent from field to GY, searches any "X-Saber" monster during the End Phase. Key for adding Faultroll from Deck to hand. 5 |
| **XX-Saber Emmersblade** | Effect Monster | Extender / Recruiter | When destroyed by battle, Special Summons a Lvl 4 or lower X-Saber from the Deck, providing board presence and deck thinning. 4 |
| **XX-Saber Fulhelmknight** | Tuner Monster | Utility / Tuner | Level 3 Tuner that can negate an attack. Can revive an X-Saber from GY after destroying a defense position monster. 4 |
| **XX-Saber Gottoms** | Synchro Monster | Boss Monster / Win Condition | Level 9 Synchro. Tributes an X-Saber to discard 1 random card from the opponent's hand. This effect is not HOPT, enabling the hand loop. 4 |
| **XX-Saber Hyunlei** | Synchro Monster | Board Breaker | Level 6 Synchro. Upon summon, destroys up to 3 Spell/Trap cards on the field, clearing the way for attacks. 5 |
| **Gottoms' Emergency Call** | Normal Trap | Extender / Disruption | Special Summons 2 X-Sabers from either player's GY. Can be used offensively to extend plays or defensively to disrupt the opponent. 4 |
| **Saber Hole** | Counter Trap | Disruption / Negation | Negates the summon of a monster and destroys it. Requires an X-Saber on the field to activate. 6 |

## Section III: The Art of War: Deconstructing X-Saber Combo Pathways

The strategic depth of X-Sabers is best understood through their combo pathways. These sequences demonstrate how individual card effects synergize to build formidable boards or execute game-winning loops. The following breakdowns are structured for clear visualization, illustrating the flow from a starting hand to a powerful end state.

### A. The Foundational Swarm: Boggart Knight into Faultroll

This is the most fundamental and crucial combo for the archetype, serving as the gateway to all other advanced plays.

* **Goal:** To establish the core XX-Saber Faultroll engine on the field.
* **Required:** XX-Saber Boggart Knight in hand + any Level 4 or lower "X-Saber" monster (e.g., XX-Saber Darksoul) in hand.
* **Sequence:**
  1. Normal Summon XX-Saber Boggart Knight.
  2. Upon its successful summon, activate Boggart Knight's trigger effect to Special Summon XX-Saber Darksoul from your hand.
  3. **Condition Met:** You now control two "X-Saber" monsters. This fulfills the summoning requirement for Faultroll.
  4. From your hand, Special Summon XX-Saber Faultroll.
* **Result:** This simple two-card combination results in a board of three monsters, including the powerful Faultroll recursion engine. From this point, you can proceed into Synchro Summons or begin the Gottoms hand loop if you have the remaining pieces.6

### B. Standard Synchro Lines

From the foundational board state, the deck can pivot into various Synchro monsters to address different threats.

#### 1. Quick Hyunlei (Backrow Removal)

* **Goal:** To swiftly remove an opponent's Spell and Trap cards.
* **Required:** XX-Saber Boggart Knight + X-Saber Pashuul (Level 2 Tuner).
* **Sequence:**
  1. Normal Summon Boggart Knight (Level 4).
  2. Activate its effect, Special Summoning Pashuul (Level 2) from your hand.
  3. Immediately perform a Synchro Summon using Boggart Knight and Pashuul. ()
  4. Synchro Summon XX-Saber Hyunlei.
  5. Upon its successful summon, activate Hyunlei's effect to target and destroy up to three Spell/Trap cards your opponent controls.6
* **Result:** A clean and efficient method to dismantle defensive boards, paving the way for direct attacks.

#### 2. Rescue Cat into Naturia Beast (Spell Negation)

This combo showcases the power of external support to produce a powerful, non-archetypal floodgate.

* **Goal:** To summon Naturia Beast to lock the opponent out of their Spell Cards.
* **Required:** Rescue Cat (or a method to summon it, such as Summoner Monk).
* **Sequence:**
  1. Normal or Special Summon Rescue Cat.
  2. Activate Rescue Cat's effect by sending it to the Graveyard.
  3. From your Deck, Special Summon two Level 3 or lower Beast-type monsters. The optimal targets for this combo are XX-Saber Darksoul (Level 3 EARTH Beast) and a Level 2 EARTH Beast Tuner like Valerifawn, Mystical Beast of the Forest.
  4. Perform a Synchro Summon using Darksoul and the Level 2 Tuner. ()
  5. Synchro Summon Naturia Beast.
  6. Because Darksoul was sent from the field to the Graveyard this turn, its effect will trigger during the End Phase, allowing you to search for any "X-Saber" monster from your Deck.7
* **Result:** You end your turn with a formidable monster that can negate Spell Cards indefinitely, while also having searched a key combo piece for your following turn.

### C. The Ultimate Technique: The Gottoms Hand Loop

This is the archetype's most infamous and powerful strategy, capable of winning the game on the first turn by leaving the opponent with no cards in hand.

* **Goal:** To discard the opponent's entire hand using the repeatable effect of XX-Saber Gottoms.
* **Core Engine:** 1 XX-Saber Gottoms, 2 XX-Saber Faultroll, and 1 XX-Saber Ragigura.
* **The Loop's Principle:** The combo functions because neither Gottoms's discard effect nor Faultroll's revival effect are hard-once-per-turn. Ragigura serves as the crucial recursion tool, adding a Faultroll from the Graveyard back to the hand, allowing it to be summoned again and continue the loop.
* **The Loop Sequence (Assuming a starting board is established):**
  1. **Start State:** Your field contains XX-Saber Gottoms and Faultroll A. Your Graveyard contains Faultroll B and XX-Saber Ragigura.
  2. Activate the effect of Faultroll A, targeting Ragigura in your Graveyard to Special Summon it.
  3. Upon being summoned, Ragigura's trigger effect activates. Target Faultroll B in your Graveyard and add it to your hand.
  4. Activate the effect of XX-Saber Gottoms, Tributing Ragigura as the cost. Your opponent discards one random card from their hand.
  5. You now control two "X-Saber" monsters (Gottoms and Faultroll A). Special Summon Faultroll B from your hand.
  6. Activate the effect of the newly summoned Faultroll B, targeting Ragigura in your Graveyard to Special Summon it.
  7. Upon being summoned, Ragigura's effect activates again. Target Faultroll A (which is now in the Graveyard if it was used as Synchro Material or otherwise sent there) or another Faultroll and add it to your hand.
  8. Activate Gottoms's effect again, Tributing Ragigura. Your opponent discards a second card.
  9. **Loop Established:** You can now repeat these steps, using one Faultroll on the field to revive Ragigura, which in turn adds the other Faultroll from the Graveyard to the hand. Each cycle tributes Ragigura to discard a card, allowing you to continue until the opponent's hand is empty.10
* **Setup Pathways:** Assembling the pieces for this loop is the deck's primary challenge. This is often accomplished using powerful non-archetypal starters like Summoner Monk (which discards a Spell to summon Rescue Cat from the deck) or engines like Predaplant, which can create M-X-Saber Invoker to Special Summon a Warrior-type X-Saber directly from the deck.7

## Section IV: Forging Alliances: External Synergies and Hybridization

Due to their age and specific combo requirements, X-Sabers have always benefited from integrating external, non-archetypal cards and engines. These alliances help compensate for weaknesses in consistency and resilience, allowing the core strategy to function more effectively.

### A. The Classic Enablers (Edison Era and Beyond)

During their prime, X-Sabers were synonymous with some of the most powerful generic support cards of the era. **Rescue Cat** was a cornerstone, a one-card starter capable of summoning two Beast-type monsters like X-Saber Airbellum and XX-Saber Darksoul directly from the deck. This single activation could lead to a Level 6 Synchro Summon and a search from Darksoul in the End Phase, generating immense advantage.6 To access Rescue Cat more consistently, players utilized **Summoner Monk**, which could discard a Spell Card to summon it from the deck.7 Furthermore, as a deck composed of Warriors and Beast-Warriors, X-Sabers naturally incorporated generic search cards like **Reinforcement of the Army** (to search XX-Saber Fulhelmknight) and **Fire Formation - Tenki** (to search XX-Saber Boggart Knight), which remain staples in any retro build.10

### B. Modern Warfare: Exploring Contemporary Engines

In the modern game, X-Sabers can be hybridized with contemporary archetypes to grant them new layers of power and protection.

* **Tri-Brigade:** A natural partner due to shared monster types. Many key X-Sabers, including Boggart Knight and Ragigura, are Beast-Warriors. This allows them to be banished from the Graveyard to fuel the effects of Tri-Brigade monsters, enabling the summon of powerful Link monsters like Tri-Brigade Ferrijit the Barren Blossom or the disruptive Tri-Brigade Shuraig the Ominous Omen. This synergy provides an alternative win condition that is less fragile than the Synchro-focused combos and allows the deck to play through disruption more effectively.8
* **Vernusylph:** This archetype provides excellent support for any EARTH-based strategy. Vernusylph monsters can be discarded along with another monster to revive an EARTH monster from the Graveyard and search for another Vernusylph. This engine would grant X-Sabers much-needed consistency, graveyard setup, and the ability to extend their combos even after being interrupted.
* **Zoodiac / Predaplant Engines:** In the Xyz era, compact engines were used to turbo out Rank 3 monsters. The Predaplant engine (Predaplant Ophrys Scorpio and Darlingtonia Cobra) or the Zoodiac engine could efficiently produce two Level 3 monsters to summon **M-X-Saber Invoker**. Invoker's effect could then Special Summon a key Warrior like XX-Saber Boggart Knight from the deck, kickstarting the main X-Saber combos without relying on drawing the specific starter.7

The history of X-Saber deck building serves as a fascinating litmus test for the broader "engine meta" across different eras of Yu-Gi-Oh!. The core X-Saber strategy—achieve critical mass to enable Faultroll and Gottoms—has remained constant. However, the *delivery system* used to achieve this goal has perfectly mirrored the dominant deck-building philosophy of each time period. In the 5D's era, this meant incorporating standalone power cards like Rescue Cat.6 During the ZEXAL era, the focus shifted to compact Xyz enablers like the Predaplant engine to summon M-X-Saber Invoker.7 In the modern Link era, the most logical partners are graveyard-centric engines like Tri-Brigade that leverage the archetype's inherent typing for a completely different summoning mechanic.8 This adaptability demonstrates that the X-Saber core is a potent win condition that readily accepts any efficient method of assembly, making its competitive history a reflection of the game's mechanical evolution.

## Section V: Strategic Deployment: Endboards and Matchup Analysis

Synthesizing the archetype's combos and synergies allows for a clear definition of its strategic goals. The deck aims to create one of two distinct endboards, each with a different approach to securing victory. Understanding these goals, as well as the deck's inherent strengths and weaknesses, is crucial for effective piloting and counter-play.

### A. Defining the Optimal Endboard

The X-Saber strategy culminates in one of two primary end states, depending on the game state and available resources.

* **The Primary Goal (Hand Annihilation):** The most powerful and sought-after endboard is the successful execution of the Gottoms hand loop. The ideal state is an established XX-Saber Gottoms on the field, potentially with other monsters for follow-up, and the opponent's hand reduced to zero or one card. This is a non-interactive win condition that preemptively neutralizes the opponent's entire strategy, leaving them with only the top card of their deck to mount a defense.6
* **The Secondary Goal (Board Control):** When the hand loop is not feasible or necessary, the deck can establish a potent control board. A classic example is the "Naturia Lock," achieved by summoning Naturia Beast to negate all Spell Cards and Naturia Barkion to negate Normal Trap Cards. This combination, often supplemented by a set Saber Hole, can completely shut down many strategies.7 Alternatively, a successful XX-Saber Hyunlei can wipe the opponent's backrow, leaving a field of high-ATK X-Saber monsters free to attack for a swift OTK (One Turn Kill).

### B. Battlefield Assessment: Strengths, Weaknesses, and Counter-Play

Like any archetype, X-Sabers possess a distinct set of advantages and vulnerabilities that define their matchups.

#### Strengths:

* **Explosive Ceiling:** When its combos are allowed to resolve, the deck has an incredibly high power ceiling, capable of generating overwhelming board presence or executing a game-winning hand loop from just a few cards.
* **Powerful, Non-HOPT Effects:** The core engine pieces, XX-Saber Faultroll and XX-Saber Gottoms, lack the modern "hard once per turn" restriction on their most important effects. This is the feature that enables their incredible looping potential.
* **Toolbox Extra Deck:** The variety of Tuner and non-Tuner levels within the archetype (Levels 1, 2, 3, 4) allows for flexible access to a wide range of powerful generic Synchro monsters, enabling the deck to adapt to different situations.

#### Weaknesses:

* **Fragility and Vulnerability to Disruption:** The deck is extremely fragile by modern standards. A single, well-timed hand trap, such as Ash Blossom & Joyous Spring on a starter like Boggart Knight or Rescue Cat, can halt its plays entirely. A board-wiping effect like Nibiru, the Primal Being is often game-ending if activated mid-combo.7
* **Reliance on the Normal Summon:** Many of the deck's most consistent combo lines begin with the Normal Summon of a key monster like Boggart Knight or Summoner Monk. This creates a critical choke point that opponents can easily exploit with cards like Effect Veiler or Infinite Impermanence.
* **Power Creep:** The archetype's main deck monsters lack any form of built-in protection (e.g., targeting immunity, destruction protection). Their core strategy of assembling multiple monsters can be too slow and resource-intensive compared to top-tier modern decks that can achieve more with fewer cards.2

#### Counter-Strategies:

To effectively counter the X-Saber strategy, an opponent should focus on disrupting the key choke points. Negating the effect of the initial Normal Summon (Boggart Knight, Summoner Monk, Rescue Cat) is the most effective tactic. Preventing the deck from establishing two monsters on the field will deny the summon of XX-Saber Faultroll, cutting the engine off before it can start. If the X-Saber player does manage to begin their combo, using a hand trap on the first activation of Faultroll's effect is the next best point of interaction.

## Conclusion

The X-Saber archetype remains a fascinating case study in Yu-Gi-Oh! card design and strategic evolution. Born in an era defined by Synchro Summoning, it pushed the boundaries of board swarming and combo potential, culminating in the legendary Gottoms hand loop—a strategy so potent it continues to be a benchmark for non-interactive win conditions. While power creep and the proliferation of hand traps have diminished its standing in the modern competitive landscape, the core engine's raw power is undeniable. The deck's identity as a "glass cannon"—capable of spectacular victories when uninterrupted but shattering at the first sign of resistance—is a testament to its high-risk, high-reward nature. For players exploring retro formats or seeking a deck with an explosive and complex combo ceiling, the X-Saber doctrine of swarm, Synchro, and hand control offers a deep and rewarding strategic experience.

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