

# BattleForge for Beginners: Building a Deck

by Richard Hagon

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, welcome to another adventure into the world of BattleForge with me, Rich Hagon. As you probably know by now, I spend my life around games, and in particular Trading Card Games, which gives me the chance to look at the cards in BattleForge with an experienced eye.

Last week, we took a look at the pre-loaded Fire deck. This week, I've enlisted the help of three players of the game, who have each taken a unique route in preparing a deck to face the various scenarios and threats within the game. As we go along, I'll illustrate some of the fundamentals of deckbuilding. Historically in the world of Trading Card Games, decks tend to do one thing, and do that thing well. Here are four types of deck:



**Rich Hagon** spends his life around games. Whether it's role-playing, board, trading card, console, or computer games, he covers events ranging from conventions to world championships. He writes for various websites, and creates audio and video content for clients around the globe, including many of the biggest names in the gaming industry. Watching the best, talking and writing about the best, and playing with the best – it doesn't get much better than that.

**Aggro** – Short for 'aggressive', this should give you some clue what the deck is trying to do – smash face repeatedly until the opponent is failing to breathe. In order to accomplish this, it's normal for a horde of small monsters/units to be established, churning them out as fast as possible, and being relatively willing to allow them to die, as long as the opponent is dying right along with them. After the initial rush comes the 'reload', or wave number two, which hopefully is enough to finish things. If not, decks like these usually have two routes to sealing the deal. First, they run Burn spells. Now although this may sound counter-intuitive, it's entirely possible for a 'Burn' spell (which sounds like it must be Fire) to come from Frost, or Nature, or Shadow. Simply, Burn spells are spells that you can aim directly at an opponent. It doesn't require you to have a card or unit in play. You can literally aim it at their head, causing as much damage as possible. Then there's the Finisher. This is generally some enormous monster that takes an age to kill, and even if it's thoroughly outnumbered it will be able to punch through the last few points of damage. An Aggro deck then is all about the fast start, and not allowing your opponents to stabilise. In a sense, Aggro is all about asking questions. Can you stop me? Am I too fast for you? Are you overwhelmed?





**Control** – While most Aggro decks tend to act the same once you get under the hood, Control decks vary hugely in strategic execution from game to game. At heart though, they have one core strategy – control the field of play, minimising the impact of opposing forces, blunting attacks, nullifying spells, and eventually going on to win when all effective routes to victory for the opposition have been sealed off. Sometimes these decks will win with objectively weak units or monsters, but that’s fine, because if there’s nothing in the way, even a humble set of archers will get the job done eventually. What makes Control decks such a challenge to play is that you need to have ‘answers’ to all opposing threats, since even one sneaking through can be the breach in the dam that brings the whole thing crashing down. Against an Aggro deck, Control wants to have the following answers:

Yes, I can stop you.

No, you’re not too fast for me.

No, I’m not overwhelmed.

Playing Control requires nerves of steel, because against an onrushing horde of shiny doom, only keeping your cool can see you emerge triumphant.

**Combo** – This stands for a Combination deck. Simply put, it seeks to manipulate the game to a point where it can accumulate a particular formula, or combination of resources/cards which can win the game all by themselves. Often this combination will be in some way infinite, whether it be gaining infinite health points, dealing infinite damage, churning out infinite resources, and so on. Because these combinations are so powerful, they are often very hard to put together, and the entire deck generally revolves around finding the so-called pieces of the Combo. Although this has no direct analogy in BattleForge – at least that I’m aware of so far – the slightly toned-down version of this is exactly what all BF players should be looking for, since Combo is the next logical step beyond simple synergy.

For those of you unfamiliar with the word, Synergy is the idea that a whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Although  $1 + 1$  is never going to actually equal 3, in game terms that’s what we try to accomplish. When we’re building a deck, we’re going to want cards that interact pleasingly with each other, often to the benefit of both, and the decks I’m going to show you today have synergy all over the place.

**The Rock** – The final type of deck I want to share with you is known as The Rock, for reasons long lost in the mists of time. This kind of deck is the toughest deck of all to play, since it attempts to cover all the bases and be capable of assuming any role in battle. Against an Aggro deck, it will use its controlling resources to stay alive and then win at leisure. Against a Control deck, it will look to make early units and force through an initial advantage using disruption in the midgame. Against Combo, it will look to deprive the opponent of key pieces of the puzzle, whilst maintaining some sort of credible threat. More than any of the other types of deck, The Rock player needs to know what other players are going to present as threats, and have a toolbox of answers to combat them.

So these are some of the kinds of deck you might decide to build. I've begun by highlighting some of their differences, but now it's time to look at some of the facets of good decks that all decent deckbuilders will use to their advantage. We begin with...

**Curve** – Everything in BattleForge uses between one and four Orbs, plus an amount of Power, before it can be cast. Everything in the game sits along an imaginary line, from the super-cheap Ice Breaker (1 blue Orb and 20 Power) through to something like a Worldbreaker Gun (4 Orbs, two of them Blue, and 250 Power). How many cards you devote to each of the four Orb Tiers is one of the key components of deckbuilding. If you're building an Aggro deck, you'll want to have plenty of cheap troops you can hurl into battle right from the start of a scenario. If you're primarily a Control deck, getting some early defence is going to be key. You certainly don't need 7 or 8 cards of your 20 dedicated to 4 Orb cards in a Control deck, because once you've reached that stage, you can almost win as you please. Perhaps 2 or 3 might suffice. Of course, the number of Orbs is only half the equation, since you can't cast without enough Power, and that makes a careful understanding of our next key consideration a crucial part of deckbuilding success...

**Efficiency** – Suppose I could do 500 damage to a typical unit at a cost of R1-250 (that's one Red Orb, one other of any color, and 250 Power). Now suppose I could do 250 damage at a cost of R1-100. In both cases I need to have two Orbs available, but although the damage is halved for my second spell, it costs less than half the Power. That's pretty much a working definition of Efficiency right there – doing something you want at the cheapest price you can find. Before we start a fight in the forums, I'm not suggesting for a moment that the cheaper spell is always going to be 'better', whatever that nebulous term might mean. However, what is undeniable is that over time I get to deal 500 damage at a cost of R1-200, rather than R1-250.



That's more efficient, all other things being equal (like cooldown times and so forth.) If what you need to do is deal 500 damage in one fell swoop, the first spell is obviously the winner, and deserves a slot in your deck. In general, the best deckbuilders are the ones who can sniff out the cards that have been undervalued, and therefore are the most Efficient at their particular jobs.

**Colors** – You won't have been playing BattleForge long before you realised that the different factions inherently bring different skillsets to the table. With that in mind, obviously the ideal would be to build you deck from all four of Fire, Frost, Nature and Shadow. Good luck my friends, you're going to need it. In most TCGs, the way you configure your deck to be able to cast the spells you need is known as a Manabase. Here in BF, it's the number of Orbs you control that dictate what you can and cannot cast. Built-in to the design of many of the cards is a double-color requirement, or occasionally even more. Take Shatter Ice (BBB1-100) as an example. This spell is so totally Frosty that it requires a whopping three blue Orbs, plus one other, before you can cast it. In a deck that's entirely Frost, you only have to worry about getting to that precious fourth Orb. But what happens if you spread your net a little wider, and build a super-defensive Frost/Nature deck? Sure, you start off with a blue Orb, but what do you do when you capture your second monument? Presumably you're going to want to start 'turning on' your Nature spells. Nothing wrong with that, but if you're running Shatter Ice you've just committed to turning Orbs three and four blue. No double green available for you.

That's just with a two-color deck. Imagine the awkwardness that awaits if you decide to try and run the best spells from all four colors. Yes, you get access to all the best cards in the game, but you are going to have a truly hellacious time trying to cast them. As a general rule, you should look to have one major color, where you can happily run cards that require a double Orb casting cost. Your secondary color might have doubles, but these probably shouldn't be part of your main plan. If you absolutely must run a third color, this needs to be almost certainly only a single Orb of that color required, and ideally a card for the late game, when you've already built up the Orbs you need for your main plans. Four colors? It might not be suicidal, but it's pretty close to juggling hand grenades. Best avoided!





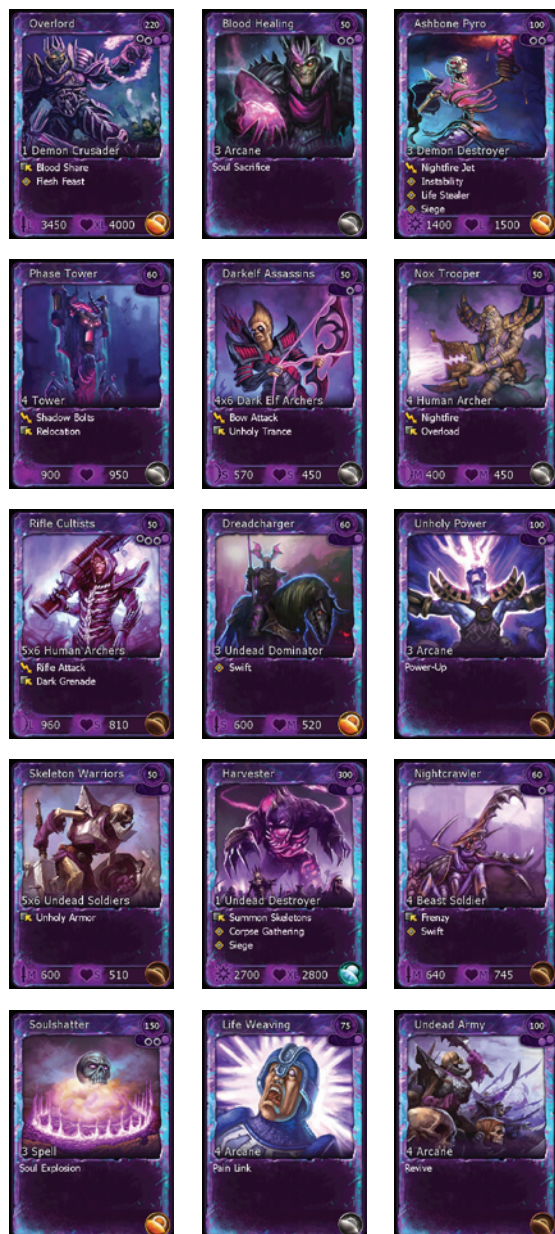
With these general points in mind, let's take a quick peek at our three decks. The first is decidedly Frosty:

Ice Barrier  
Home Soil  
Defense Tower  
Frost Mage  
Fire Stalker  
Lyrish Knight  
Cannon Tower  
Coldsnap  
Skyelf Templar  
Magma Hurler  
Skyelf Sage  
Stronghold  
Frost Shard  
Avatar of Frost  
Shatter Ice  
Skyelf Commander  
Battleship  
Maelstrom  
Construct  
Worldbreaker Gun

First, the facts.

Creatures – 10  
Buildings – 5  
Spells – 5  
1 Orb – 4  
2 Orbs – 5  
3 Orbs – 5  
4 Orbs – 6

So what does the deck do? At a single Orb, it's all about setting up the defence. Home Soil is all about keeping your friends close and your enemies at distance, while only Frost Mage can come out of the gates early. This is not an Aggro deck by any stretch of the imagination. More monsters come online at the 2 Orb mark, including the first of the Skyelf squad, in this case the Templar.



Key to the success of this deck is the fabulous interactions between the Skyelves and the Buildings. The Templar can bind itself to a Building in order to facilitate regeneration. That's good, because you want your Buildings to hang around into the late game. The Skyelf Sage is the aggressive one (and the best looking, come to that. Connection?). Using High Guard to bind this to a Building adds a mighty 85% more damage. That's a monstrous upgrade. And then we have the Skyelf Commander, who ensures that the Building you've just turned into a beatstick of doom gets to keep on trucking, thanks to it growing a ton of extra defences.

Coldsnap is an interesting card, because it doesn't actually deal damage. Instead, it's effectively a healing spell. How come? Well, it's true to say that it doesn't actually reverse damage already dealt, but what it does is buy you time to build up your defences. In classical terms, we would call this a Tempo card, blunting an early rush. The rest of the spell base is all about oblivionating as much as possible. Frost Shard, Maelstrom, and Shatter Ice are all quality Burn spells.

That leaves the two red cards, Fire Stalker and Magma Hurler. This is a prime example of what's known as a 'Splash'. That's to say you dip into a second color for particular skills you feel you can't live without that aren't catered for by your main color. Although they require two and three Orbs respectively, only one Red color is required, making them easy to cast.

Cards that work well together, a deck with a plan, a reasonable curve, this is a solid Control deck. Time to move on, and our next offering is in some ways a work in progress, since it only runs to 15 cards:

Nox Trooper  
Skeleton Warriors  
Phase Tower  
Dreadcharger  
Life Weaving  
Darkelf Assassins  
Nightcrawler  
Unholy Power  
Undead Army  
Harvester  
Blood Healing  
Ashbone Pyro  
Soulshatter  
Rifle Cultists  
Overlord



Creatures – 9

Buildings – 1

Spells – 5

1 Orb – 5

2 Orbs – 5

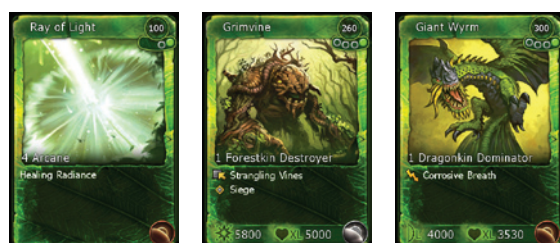
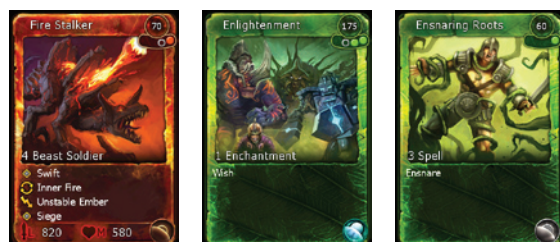
3 Orbs – 3

4 Orbs – 2

I suppose there is an argument for leaving your screen uncluttered, but it's hard to imagine this deck couldn't be improved with five extra options, even if they're going to be used infrequently. However, what's already here is a classic Aggro deck. Nox Trooper and Skeleton Warriors come barrelling out for minimal outlay, and Dreadcharger doesn't hang about, using its Swift ability. Although at first glance Phase Tower is an odd choice, the ability to shift it further afield makes it much closer to an ordinary fight-and-move unit. Another full third of the deck is taken up at the two slot, with more Swift courtesy of Nightcrawler and the chance to use Unholy Power on one of your early squads for a massive upgrade.

Life Weaving is a spell that interests me very much, since it highlights a classic element of deckbuilding. The card is broadly symmetrical. That's to say that its apparent negative impact is equal to its positive impact. Yes, some damage is reduced, but it gets redistributed and amongst your own units as well. Surely that's bad? Normally it would be, but this deck seeks to subvert that apparent downside with Undead Army and Harvester. Basically, with this deck, you get better value out of your creatures dying than they do out of theirs, because once the other lot are dead, they stay dead. Once your lot are dead – and you're even willing to help this process along with Blood Healing – they get to come back in skeletal form.

In the Burn department, this deck looks a little light, running only Soulshatter. You could make a case for all sorts of cards to supplement this, but Undead Army and Harvester both demand double Purple as early as your second Orb, so any color versatility you run won't come online until later in the game. That said, there's plenty of nice synergy here, and a deck like this would provide a stern examination to a Control deck, looking to overwhelm it in the early game.



And that brings us to our final deck, which is based around Nature.

The online community seems to be gravitating towards Nature as arguably the best Faction to base a deck around. Let's see if that makes sense, with this little lot:

Primal Defender  
Ensnaring Roots  
Shaman  
Windweavers  
Mark of the Keeper  
Surge of Light  
Fire Stalker  
Healing Well  
Curse of Oink  
Breeding Grounds  
Ray of Light  
Healing Gardens  
Swamp Drake  
Enlightenment  
Wheel of Gifts  
Razorleaf  
Grimvine  
Primeval Watcher  
Giant Wyrn  
Mind Control

Creatures – 8  
Buildings – 6  
Spells – 6  
1 Orb – 6  
2 Orbs – 5  
3 Orbs – 5  
4 Orbs – 4

A quick survey of all the single Orb spells gives us a great idea of what this deck is trying to do. Primal Defender is extremely Efficient, and can deal with both ground and air forces. Ensnaring Roots helps to ensure the Defender stays around, since it slows opposition forces to a crawl. The Shaman is there to also make attacking like wading through treacle, while Windweavers aids the early game defence. Mark of the Keeper shuts down so many options for your opponent it isn't even funny, and Surge of Light re-energises the whole she-bang. Quite frankly, that sounds like an entire deck right there, and we've still got 14 cards to go!



The theme continues at the two Orb slot, with Curse of Oink another Tempo card, designed to give you breathing room, or possibly time for a quick bacon sandwich. In a sense, Breeding Grounds is also a Tempo card, since it allows you to pay less for your units, and therefore summon them faster. Ray of Light and Healing Well both do exactly what it says on the tin, and Fire Stalker increasingly seems to be a splash card of choice from Fire.

At three Orbs, by far and away the most interesting card is Enlightenment. In card terms, we would refer to this as a Tutor, meaning that we can search our deck for a particular card, and then put it into our hand or into play. The analogy within BF is that Enlightenment effectively turns any spell in your deck into costing GG1-175, the cost of Enlightenment itself. This instantly brings forward the point in the game you can cast your four Orb spells, and you save an absolute fortune in Power if you use Enlightenment to bring out a Grimvine, Primeval Watcher, Giant Wurm or (humourously) Mind Control.

If ever there was a card that rewarded you for playing a hardcore Control deck, this is it. Whether you call it Brel'noir Mindbender from World of Warcraft, or Sower of Temptation from Magic the Gathering, the Trading Card world has a stack of iconic spells that mess with your opponent by stealing their stuff. Here, Mind Control does exactly that, since although it technically has a limitation attached, if you can't steal something worthwhile at 4 Orbs and 300 Power or less, something's either going very wrong or very right (like they've got nothing left!).

To me, this is a really well put-together deck. It has a dedicated theme which it pursues relentlessly, and although it doesn't have quite the internal synergies of the other two decks we've looked at today (the Skyelves + Buildings in the Frost deck, and Speed + Benefits from Dying in the Shadow deck), it more than makes up for it with excellent spells put together in tight fashion.

So there you have it, a whirlwind guide to deckbuilding. Don't be put off if it all seems overwhelming to start with. Even the best deckbuilders in the world started somewhere, and now is a great time to get onboard. Whatever decks you build, have fun, and enjoy the game!

As ever,  
R.

*Rub*