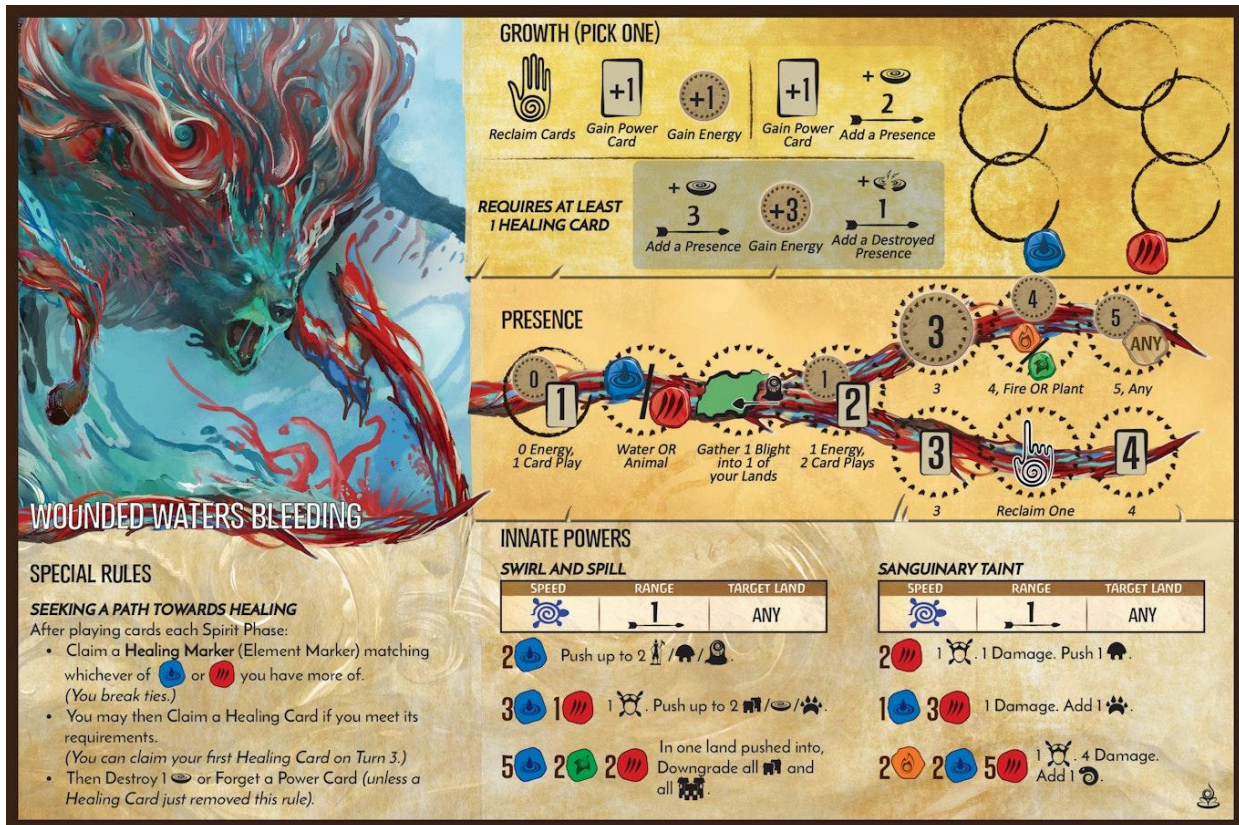


Wounded Waters Bleeding Guide from Hito

Version: 1.1

Last Updated: Mar 16, 2025



WOUNDED WATERS BLEEDING

GROWTH (PICK ONE)

- Reclaim Cards
- +1 Gain Power Card
- +1 Gain Energy
- +1 Gain Power Card
- +2 Add a Presence

REQUIRES AT LEAST 1 HEALING CARD

- +3 Add a Presence
- +3 Gain Energy
- +1 Add a Destroyed Presence

PRESENCE

0 Energy, 1 Card Play

Water OR Animal

Gather 1 Blight into 1 of your Lands

1 Energy, 2 Card Plays

3, 4, Fire OR Plant, 5, Any

3, Reclaim One, 4

INNATE POWERS

SWIRL AND SPILL

SPEED	RANGE	TARGET LAND
2	1	ANY
3	1	ANY
5	2	ANY

SANGUINARY TAINT

SPEED	RANGE	TARGET LAND
2	1	ANY
1	3	ANY
2	2	ANY

SPECIAL RULES

SEEKING A PATH TOWARDS HEALING

After playing cards each Spirit Phase:

- Claim a Healing Marker (Element Marker) matching whichever of or you have more of. (You break ties.)
- You may then Claim a Healing Card if you meet its requirements. (You can claim your first Healing Card on Turn 3.)
- Then Destroy 1 or Forget a Power Card (unless a Healing Card just removed this rule).

Introduction

Wounded Waters Bleeding ([Spirit Island Wiki](#)) is my favorite Spirit in Spirit Island. They're a very tactical spirit with lots of game-to-game variation, a high average power level, and lots of unique interactions owing to their unique Healing mechanic (more on that soon!). If you like cooking a battle plan in pregame and then executing it precisely, you might not like Waters so much; if you like looking for clever trades on the board and improvising on the fly around your drafts, Waters might be for you. This guide will share tricks that work against Level 6 adversaries the vast majority of the time with minimal support. I'm not considering support even though it's very strong on Waters because of the broad conception that Waters *needs* such support to get over their early game; this is not true, and I want to focus on communicating that. I'm not considering dual adversaries because high level dual adversary play often turns into looking for action skips

and stable reclaim loops, the former of which Waters doesn't have and the latter of which Waters doesn't want to do. I'm uncertain how high Waters can go in dual adversary play; it would be interesting to learn but it's not the focus here.

Some brute facts and a note on pedagogy

Waters being more tactical than strategic is a big part of why I like them, but that also makes them harder to write guides for. If your spirit's power budget is in executing combos like the [Serpent/Memory](#) synergy, then you can write how the combo works and communicate a large amount of information efficiently. If your spirit's power budget is in enabling lots of unique clever trades on board, then it's harder to describe how to play in a general guide. As such, we'll need to look at things in a bit of a spiral, sketching out some of Waters's capabilities very roughly and coming back to fill in the details later.

So I'm going to just drop some facts about Waters that we'll need to reference to move forward(Maybe I should say "near facts"; there are rare exceptions to some of these.)

- During the first three turns, your growth option will always be the same: adding presence at range 2 and drafting a power card.
- Your growths start down the same middle track until you add your fourth presence, so you will always have 0 energy/1 card play for turn 1 and 2, and 1 energy/2 card plays for turn 3.
- During the first four turns, you'll be destroying one of your own presence on the board.
- Due to the above two bullet points, **you start with 4 energy and 4 presence on the board** to make the spirit still playable.
- You have a water or animal tag unlocked from turn 1. Unlike elements gained from Growth, you can assign this tag to be water or animal at ANY point in the turn. We'll call this tag your "dual tag" throughout the guide.
- You have a "water innate", Swirl and Spill, and an "animal innate", Sanguinary Taint. In combination with your dual tag, you can use tier 1 of one of your two innates on only one card play, and tier 2 of one of them on only two card plays.
- Starting turn 2, you have the ability to gather 1 blight into your lands every turn.
- Starting turn 3, you gain a Healing card (a mechanic unique to Waters) that gives you one of two new Special Rules. Both of these Special Rules are extremely strong and change the function of many Powers you might draft.
- Starting turn 5, you gain another Healing card that replaces one of your slow innates with a fast innate.

Don't worry if that seems like a disjointed bunch of facts that doesn't tell you much about playing Waters. We'll be examining these one by one and talking about them - this list is just solving the dependency problem where explaining any single fact requires us to reference others.

Sidebar: you said “high average power level” up there, but isn’t Waters one of the weaker spirits?

There’s a lot of ways to define power level in Spirit Island. They are less correlated than usual for Waters, so we’ll go through them individually:

- Can you beat Level 6 adversaries solo, or in multiplayer games without receiving support? **Yes!** Granted, if you get good enough at Spirit Island, most spirits can reach this stage. But it’s worth noting that Waters is not at all a weak spirit. They win and win a lot!
- Will you feel strong while doing it? **Yes!** Waters quickly gets to a spot where they can do more than their fair share; you’ll usually be helping other boards in multiplayer more than you’re getting helped. And Healing unlocks interesting interactions that make normally dull cards shine, which always helps the overpowered feeling. (When’s the last time you drafted [Strong and Constant Currents](#) and thought “Damn, what a bomb”?)
- Are you edge case proof? Can you handle runs of bad luck? **Mostly!** There are three main circumstances in Spirit Island where letting blight through is worse than usual: cascades, presence destruction, and Dahan death. Waters has good answers for all of these! They can gather blight starting turn 2, so they should avoid most cascades; they are forced to destroy their own presence the first four turns, so they should avoid losing any more to blight (just choose to destroy the presence in the vulnerable spot before the blight comes); and their innates make Dahan movement available every turn. However, the mandatory pattern of 1/1/2 cards played the first three turns can leave you vulnerable to a few specific edge cases: Habsburg Livestock loss condition, Sweden adding double blight with a 6+ overkill ravage, or a really bad first ravage against Prussia. The turn 2 event is a bigger deal for Waters than most spirits because you simply don’t have the tempo to prepare for any bad breaks.
- How much blight do you generally add? **2-3 ish, but that’s misleading.** When you’re good enough at Spirit Island that you almost always win, it’s natural to use the blight left on the card as a proxy for your “degree of victory”. But how close to defeat a given blight count represents obviously varies a lot spirit to spirit. If you’re base Fangs, every blight added meaningfully reduces your ability to win; if you’re Vengeance, you’re probably worse-off having added 0 blight than adding 2! As Waters, it’s *very difficult to avoid adding a couple blight in the first three turns*, because you are stuck on such a small number of card plays, but it’s *very easy to avoid adding blight after that*, because you have lots of flexibility to apply exactly as much force as you need to stop a ravage. Because you can gather the blight and you have two abilities that target from blighted lands, the blight you add has very little bearing on your chances to win, and it’s not a big deal. But sure, if you were trying to play 10 games of Spirit Island adding as little blight as possible, Waters wouldn’t be one of your choices.

Overall, the main takeaway about Waters’ power level is that you **lack the consistent guarantees of the very strongest spirits**, and so your games will sometimes be thrown into

chaos. But you are able to allocate your actions extremely efficiently, making you **one of the best spirits to navigate chaotic situations**. I think of Waters as being one of the strongest “fair” spirits, but a bit weaker than spirits like Fractured, Green, or Stone that get to simply ignore some aspect of the game.



Note that the Waters relative power level goes up even more if your metric is “How good is the Spirit in their worst matchup?” Waters’ three mandatory early drafts means that their worst matchups are less punishing than other spirits. You get to flex so much in response to the adversary that you can’t really be hard-counteracted.

First Healing Card

The first thing we’ll examine in detail is the healing mechanic, since it’s totally unique to Waters.

SEEKING A PATH TOWARDS HEALING

After playing cards each Spirit Phase:

- Claim a **Healing Marker** (Element Marker) matching whichever of  or  you have more of. (*You break ties.*)
- You may then Claim a Healing Card if you meet its requirements. (*You can claim your first Healing Card on Turn 3.*)
- Then Destroy 1 presence or Forget a Power Card (*unless a Healing Card just removed this rule*).

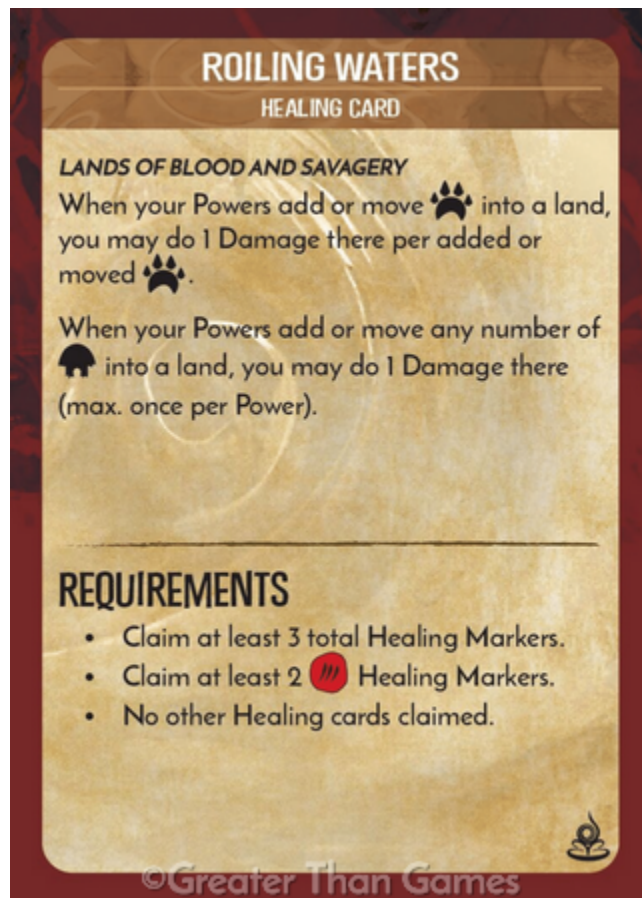
You get a healing marker every turn - this can’t be changed with proliferations or anything like that. You get one Healing card turn 3 based on whichever Marker you have 2 of, and another Healing card turn 5 based on whichever marker you have 3 of. The second Healing card is what removes the Special Rule, which means you need to do the presence destruction and power card forgetting 4 times.

You can *technically* delay Healing if you don’t like the markers you have and want to heal the other way, but you should almost never do this. Similarly, you should choose the presence destruction option 99% of the time; the forget a power option is only there if some surprise presence destruction happened and you need all your presence on board to avoid losing or to target a key power. If you’re going to consider this, make sure you read the [Turn 3+4 guide](#) before forgetting a power from hand - doing so really hampers your available options.

“You break ties” makes it pretty flexible what marker you get, especially since you can choose to allocate your dual tag before or after claiming the marker. For example, if you have 1 animal and 1 water, you can choose to heal animal as a tiebreak but wait on the dual tag until the slow phase, getting your choice of innate power. Conversely, if you have 2 water and 1 animal in play but really want an animal marker, you can FIRST use your dual tag as an animal to reach a 2/2 tie, THEN break it in favor of animal. (This is less good because it usually means getting two tier 1 innates instead of one tier 2 innate. But sometimes you gotta do it.)

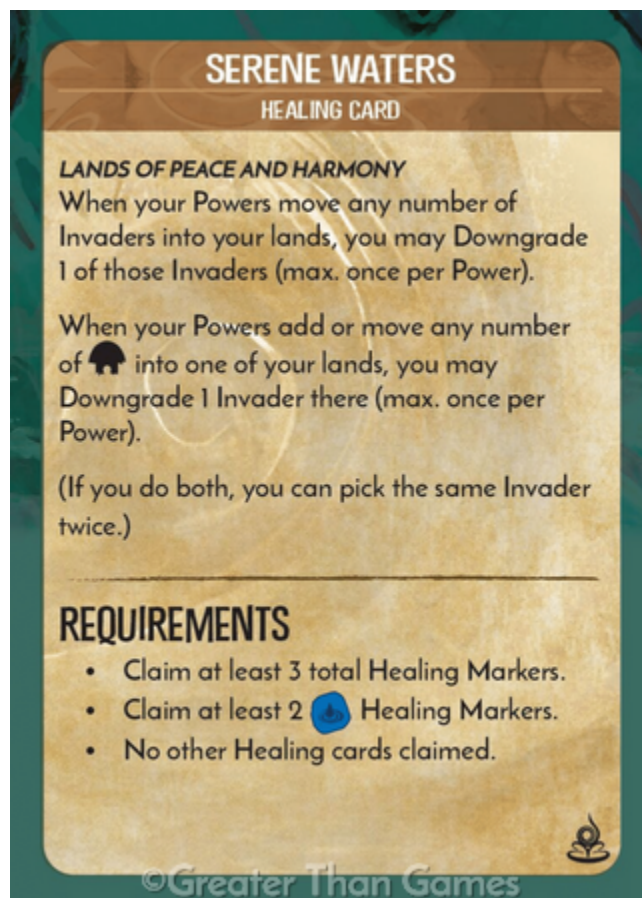
On turn 3, you’ll gain one of two healing cards that give you a new Special Rule. **This is when you come online.** Both of these special rules are extremely powerful and fundamentally change how the game is played. Throughout this guide, I will refer to taking Roiling Waters as “healing animal” and taking Serene Waters as “healing water”. You may have heard people talk about Waters “fully healing” when they have both healing cards; this is invader propaganda trying to stop you from embracing your full tempo spirit identity starting turn 3. **The first healing card is the one that matters!**

Roiling Waters



Roiling Waters gives you an absurd number of small damage pings. You add beasts with one innate and move them with the other, you add a beast with one of your uniques, you move Dahan with *both* of your innates, and Dahan/beast movement and addition is very cheap to come by in the Minor Power deck. As Roiling Waters, you'll clear things down to just a couple of lands very quickly. Your only "weakness", such as it is, is that very built up lands with multiple cities can be hard to solve efficiently without the right Major. But most spirits are like that; I only really note it as a weakness because Serene doesn't have it (in exchange for a couple of other weaknesses.)

Serene Waters



Serene Waters is more finicky than Roiling; the movement has to be *into* your land, which makes it harder to influence a lot of lands at once. In particular, **Serene is much worse in games where early events made you lose presence beyond your normal 1/turn**, because your power is directly proportional to the coverage of your presence network. And because you're not actually killing anything with this rule, Serene has a severe problem with fear. You'll often end up in the "Serene Waiting Room" where you qualify for a Terror Level 2 or 3 victory before actually reaching that level.

In exchange, you get an overwhelming capability to create pockets or solve built up lands. Dahan movement is just about the cheapest effect you can get in Spirit Island, and making one Dahan movement enough to take a building off the board throws the economy of Spirit Island totally out of whack. For example, remember when I said *Strong and Constant Currents* can become a bomb with the right healing card?



On its own, this is a pretty boring card. But with *Serene Waters* and proper setup, you can downgrade the town you push into an explorer AND use the Dahan push to downgrade anything you want, even a Coastal City! Do you understand how doomed the poor Scots are when you can downgrade their freshly explored coastal town AND their coastal city that's giving Chart the Coastline adjacency using the same single card play? At fast speed? For zero energy?! As we'll see in the adversary matchups section, there are some adversaries whose gimmicks simply short-circuit when faced with *Serene Waters*.

Which one's better?

Both versions of Waters have absurdly great action economy, able to fine-tune their response land by land to a much higher precision than most spirits. Roiling Waters combines this with very generous range and good fear generation. Serene Waters, by contrast, requires some setup and is terrible on fear, but once they're going, they can simply solve anything regardless of how built up it is.

The way I like to think about it is that Roiling Waters is the more "complete" healing. If you're unsure what's good or you're on the ropes early, just choose Roiling: it's never flat-out wrong. (Though as we'll see, it's *close* to being flat out wrong into England.) By contrast, Serene can be flat-out wrong: if you really need fear, if you really need to act at long range, or if you've lost early presence, then Serene will underperform. But in games where those downsides *aren't* a huge deal, then Serene will be able to set up more dramatic pockets and lock the game down.

Now we'll jump to your uniques and starting Innates. Since your second healing card will replace one of your starting innates, it'll make more sense to finish up healing after we've seen your starting powers.

Uniques and Starting Innates

Boon of Corrupted Blood



It's pretty common to use this turn 1 to kill an explorer and stop a build. Good old reliable! In multiplayer games it can sometimes create really insane pockets, especially when combined with a tempo spirit. Always make sure to check if anyone wants Boon of Corrupted Blood in exchange for helping one of your lands turn 1 or turn 2.

The effect doesn't scale very well, but the tags sure do - this has perfect tags for one of your second healing cards, Waters Taste of Ruin. If you're going for an early Major playstyle, this is often your first card forgotten, since it has the ideal pattern of "good early, worse late." If you're flogging minors, it's more likely you hang on to this all game. We'll get into more detail on this in the Openings section.

Draw to the Water's Edge



This card would be a *lot* better if it wasn't for that "from a single land". As is, it's not too common you want to grab 2 towns from the same source, so this is a pretty costly card for not much benefit. But don't think of this in terms of value: **this is your not lose card**. Waters is all about getting ahead on tempo and staying there with powerful slow powers. If you need to stop a city build or take one town's damage off a ravage, and you need to do it fast, then until you draft something better this is what you get. It's your insurance policy; even if your plan is to heal Roiling and you'd rather drop this card early to save animal tags for post-healing, make sure you're not going to need it later. In particular, Scotland and Habsburg Livestock often create situations where you hit the adversary loss condition without this card, and it can often turn a double ravage into a single one against Sweden.

If you heal Serene it becomes useful enough that you'll usually hold on to it all game. It's got perfect elements for your other second healing card, Waters Renew. And since it's range 0, you can always downgrade one town you gather.

Blood Water and Bloodlust



Disease is disease: frustratingly unreliable, but powerful when it works. Helps a lot with France and Habsburg Mining Expedition unless the event decides you're having a bad day. If you heal Roiling, then you often just use this as a one-damage ping without really caring about the disease. Also the tags are fantastic for a lot of Majors that you're interested in — it's often the case that your decision on when to play this is based less on its effect and more on the tags.

Wrack with Pain and Grief









This is your best Unique power. If you're Serene, that 2 flat fear is an absolute godsend and you get to downgrade one of the pushed pieces. But even if you heal Roiling, your game plan is going wide and solving all the little lands before they become big ones, and this just solves another little land. Especially nice to play on stage boundaries that risk back to backs of the same terrain type happening twice ("B2Bs") such as Turn 1 Prussia; if a land explores, builds town, then explores again, Wrack turns it into 1 explorer who dies to 1 Dahan.







You may notice that these powers are weaker than the average spirit's uniques. This is because when you're drafting, you're not drafting from the normal Minor and Major power decks, you're drafting from the Exclusive Deluxe Power Decks. You get the gold-plated *Strong and Constant Currents* that downgrades a city and a town, not the boring one for normies. So your uniques are just there to get you going; don't dwell on them too much or work too hard to save the ones in your discard. Conversely, while your unique powers are weak (to stay balanced post-healing), your innate powers are very, very strong (because they need to be usable on one card play and better on two).






Swirl and Spill

SWIRL AND SPILL

SPEED	RANGE	TARGET LAND
	1 	ANY

2  Push up to 2   .

3  1  1  Push up to 2   .

5  2  2  In one land pushed into,
Downgrade all  and all .

Early game, the 2 explorer movement can help a land that just explored - it's especially great into France and HME, who will often put 2 explorers into empty lands. Post healing, the Dahan movement becomes very relevant, since it's either worth 1 damage or 1 downgrade into a land of yours.



Tier 2 is insanely flexible. If you've healed Serene, you get to downgrade one of those pushed towns into an explorer. If you've healed Roiling, you get to do one damage for every beast you've added. A common combo when you've healed Roiling but happen to have a round with Tier 2 Swirl is to combine your water card with Blood Water Bloodlust. This does 1 damage in the origin, and then 2 damage in an adjacent land (or 3 if the origin land already had a beast!).




Also, don't sleep on the presence movement. (Remember that you can only move YOUR presence with this.) On Serene it can be very useful to do your Swirl and Spill pushes and then move the presence so that you have another land that's valid for downgrades. It's also nice the turn before your reclaim - you can see what the next invader card is then make sure you've got presence in a good spot. Note that it tragically does NOT work to push your presence and a town into the same land and then downgrade that town on arrival. The land has to have been your land at the start of the push.


Tier 3 is not really relevant for your board— by the time you could pay such a cost, you've long since downgraded all of the buildings in your lands. I've only ever used it when receiving support to fix a problem land on a board adjacent to mine. You can ignore it more of the time.

Sanguinary Taint

SANGUINARY TAINT

SPEED	RANGE	TARGET LAND
	1 	ANY

2  1 . 1 Damage. Push 1 .

1  3  1 Damage. Add 1 .

2  2  5  1 . 4 Damage. Add 1 .

On turns 1 and 2, you'll often just pop tier 1 to kill an explorer and empty out a land. Boring but useful. Fear's nice. Occasionally you'll use this on a land without invaders just to get a Dahan in range for a good counterswing - unlike some powers, you get the fear even targeting a land with no invaders.

But when you heal Roiling, tier 2 becomes point and click city destruction (2 damage + 1 for adding the beast), with a bonus ping in an adjacent land if there's Dahan in the origin. This is your bread and butter combo. It rules. Getting to kill a city from an innate you reach on 2 card plays is not a very common thing in Spirit Island, and this one is remarkably unconditional. Obviously you'll sometimes kill 3 russian explorers or town + explorer or something, but think about this as your city killing tool first and foremost - once you heal Roiling like half the minor powers can kill explorers for you. A BIG part of the Roiling power budget is getting to point and click 3 damage every turn.

The final tier is a bit more relevant than Serene, because Roiling isn't quite as good at breaking down super-entrenched lands. But not *that* much more relevant: it's pretty unusual for games to last that long. Still, it means that if you're going minors only or hit a bum major, you eventually get a way to close out a big land.

Second Healing Card

Okay, now that we've seen the innates that you'll be replacing, let's jump back to the world of healing and look at the card you'll get on turn 5.

Waters Renew



This card rules so hard when you heal Serene. You downgrade once with the gather, then defend 3. The beast isn't as relevant as Serene but nice to have. Then you replace one invader with a Dahan. If the land had a city, this is effectively Defend 7 (1 damage removed via downgrade, defend 3, and the city removed), or potentially even more if certain invaders have damage buffs. That's a lot! And it puts Dahan in a ravaging land that's being defended, which is exactly where you want them.

Not only that, but that "Defend 3 OR downgrade 1" means that if you have no relevant ravaging lands (which happens a lot with Serene), then you can double downgrade one invader and replace another, letting you turn City + City into Explorer + Dahan. So it's an absolutely cracked defense power that converts into raw value if you don't need the defense this turn. Beautiful.

If you're Roiling, it might seem like this is still a pretty good power. Two one-damage pings means you can kill a town, then you get the defense to clean up the rest. But here's the problem:

Replaces *SANGUINARY TAINT*

Replaces *SANGUINARY TAINT*

Replaces *SANGUINARY TAINT*

No more Sanguinary Taint?! What's your plan for the slow phase, big guy? Gonna replace your unconditional 3 damage city kill + adjacent Dahan ping with "3 damage but only if there are 2 beasts and a Dahan all in one land adjacent to the land I care about?" Not needing to do all this setup is the whole advantage you have over Serene. Why did you throw that away? Maybe you can draft *Give the Invaders A Warm Blanket and a Big Bowl of Ice Cream* to lean into your new identity of being bad at your job? You

make me sick. And god help you if you missed a Tier 2 Sanguinary on the two turns you had access to it in order to get a Water healing marker.

Your second healing card should usually match your first, because your slow innates pair very well with the matching special rule and replacing them stinks. That's true even when the replacement power is as strong as Waters Renew. Roiling Waters wants to flog Sanguinary Taint into the dirt; don't get distracted by the fake choice of "Do I want to continue using my really good power or throw it away?"

Having said that, Turn 5 is interesting on Waters in that it is often the backbreaker turn that shuts down the invaders so hard they never recover. If your Renew defense solves the last built up land, then it hardly matters that you lost Taint. So take a moment to check whether you can go in for the killing blow. But if you can't, be really careful about cutting yourself off from Sanguinary Taint.

Waters Taste of Ruin



The flat fear is honestly the most relevant threshold - as Waters your board is often a lot farther ahead than your fear progression and all flat fear is nice. This can also kill cities at max threshold if you have explorer and Dahan/Town in that land.

This power has a bit of a split identity. On one fire / three animal, this is a good way to stop another mid-tier land with no city from building up into anything dangerous. At max threshold, this can clear out a more built up land. But the fast power phase comes right after the slow power phase, where Roiling Waters had access to Sanguinary Taint. So do you need to invest tags in another tool for big lands? Usually I think it's overkill if you're drafting a Major, but it's an important part of the all-minor strategy. In practice this is sort of the same question as "Should I forget Boon of Corrupted Blood?", since that card has perfect tags if you're aiming for max threshold.

While I cautioned above that split healings are often a trap, there's one really well defined case for *Serene Waters Taste of Ruin*. Sometimes by turn 5 you're in the Serene Waiting Room - only explorers on the island, easily enough downgrade power to get rid of any new buildings, but a few too many explorers to go for the terror level 1 victory. In those cases you might want to grab Waters Taste of Ruin to get 2 fear/turn. (Make sure you check how much fire you have before doing this! Will you be able to easily play 1 a turn, at least until you can unlock the fire tag up top?)

Adversary Matchups

Spiral thinking again - we want to talk about adversary specific matchup concerns before talking about Water's play patterns in general. This is because your general play patterns are heavily influenced by which healing you're going for, and the most important concern for that is the adversary you're up against. This isn't a detailed bible on playing each matchup, just some tactical notes that will help contextualize what's to come. (In order to communicate whether a power draft is worth changing your planned healing, you need to know what your planned healing is!) Matchups are presented in rough order of difficulty. Remember, these are all referring to the level 6 version of the adversary.

Russia - Easy, Both Healings Great

Probably your easiest matchup. If you downgrade a Russian explorer, you get to ignore *A Sense for Impending Disaster* and just take them off the board entirely. Hearing this may make it sound like Serene is a hard counter to Russia and the healing you want every time. But Roiling into Russia is also very strong, because they simply don't add enough plastic to stop you from cleaning out huge tracts of wilderness. Roiling does trigger the fear bomb very quickly, which is fine for you, but make sure your friends can handle it. Game plan is very straightforward - allow one blight on the first two ravages to stop Pressure for Fast Profit, and then you probably never blight again.

On Roiling, once you hit Terror Level 2, keep an eye on the number of buildings on the island. Sometimes you'll want to kill 3 explorers over 1 city, just to make sure 2 of them really die. But Russia isn't that great at adding buildings, so eventually you'll want to pivot to just killing all the buildings and winning. This moment might come sooner than you expect :)

Scotland - Easy, Slight Serene Preference But Both Healings Great

Because Scotland is focused on the coasts specifically, Serene Waters knows where they want to have their presence and Dahan set up from the start of the game. This is a huge advantage! Once you have an empty coast with presence + Dahan, the scots explore it and add a town, then you use Swirl and Spill to push that town to an adjacent land with your presence (downgrading it to an explorer) and push a Dahan to one of your adjacent lands (downgrading, say, a coastal city). You get rid of the cities first thing to stop Chart the Coastline, then clean up the rest.

Having said all that, Scotland has no bonus health or anything like that, so if your drafts are telling you to go Roiling, feel free to listen to them. It works fine. Just kill cities instead of downgrading them.

France - Easy, Strong Roiling Preference

You know what they say about French explorers - they're one build away from being French towns. Don't bother with downgrades. Heal Roiling and blow em all up. France is a check on how much early damage you can deal, and lucky for you, you deal a lot. Your first empowered Sanguinary Taint is turn 3 slow, and the first Slave Rebellion is turn 4 - so you might want to take a slightly sub-optimal Sanguinary Taint to get a Dahan into position.

This is a very common matchup to do the healing marker crossover on turn 1 or 2 - play a dual element water/animal card, heal Animal, then save your dual tag so you have the option to do Swirl and Spill in slow phase. That way when Frontier Explorers adds 2 explorers to an empty land, you can push them both while still scaling towards Roiling.

Habsburg Mining Expedition - Easy, Strong Roiling Preference

You have a lot of good stuff going for you in this matchup. Your extra starting blight helps turn off The Empire Ascendent (and in multiplayer games, you can try to steal a blight from an adjacent board). You have disease on tap as a ravage skip. The loss condition is much less relevant thanks to your blight gather. And HME in general is a check on how precisely you can control the number of invaders in each land -- I cannot stress enough that action efficiency is the precise thing Waters is really really good at.

Because you're trying to manipulate the number of invaders in each land, direct damage is usually a lot better than downgrading - you should default to Roiling most of the time. As with France, you'll often want to do the "heal animal, use Swirl and Spill Tier 1" trick on turn 1 or 2. Put a lot of thought into your Mining Booms - often you'll pick a land with Dahan adjacent to somewhere that needs a one-damage ping, so you can get extra value using Sanguinary Taint on it.

Prussia - Easy overall but chance to swing early, Slight Roiling Preference

Prussia doesn't demand much in each land that it threatens, but it demands you do a lot on the first two turns, during which you're only playing one card a turn. The way I think about the Prussia matchup is that it's easy but you need one thing to go right. If you get a defense power or otherwise useful minor on your first draft, you're fine. If you don't, you need your turn 2 draft to also be a minor draft and you try again. If you whiff both of those drafts, you're hoping for a good event. (Any event card with defense per Dahan can usually clinch it, so if my first two drafts suck, I usually end up playing as though I'm getting one and hoping I'm right). If your first

two drafts and turn 2 event are all bad, then you risk blighting the island turn 2 and you might be in trouble, especially with a bad blight card like Downward Spiral. But outside of this case, Prussia folds instantly after you heal. It goes so fast that you'll usually prefer Roiling, but Serene can also make some very quick pockets.

While *Boon of Corrupted Blood* may seem appealing as a turn 1 play, I usually prefer to open with *Wrack with Pain and Grief* into Prussia, assuming that my blighted lands see an explorer-only land for both terrains that are building. If one terrain has a back to back, you can use Wrack on the matching land with explorer + explorer + town to move it down to just explorer, then use Taint or Swirl on an adjacent land to get Dahan in there for a counterswing.

England - Moderate, Very Strong Serene Preference, maybe worse at high player counts?

Bad news - Roiling is way worse when Sanguinary Taint isn't point and click city killing. Good news - Serene is busted strong into England, since you ignore their bonus HP entirely and you have enough raw downgrade power to create pockets that mitigate the High Immigration builds and allow you to stop even the English from building stuff. Serene Waters is the only spirit I've gotten a Terror Level 1 victory into England with. Similar to Scotland, you have forewarning on the built up areas you'll want to deal with, so you can get presence and Dahan in the right spots. And if capital threat is looming you can toss in one downgrade no sweat to avoid losing while you work on dissolving them from the frontier in. But it takes ages to actually hit a victory condition, which makes this a bit worse than the previous matchups.

One note - the majority of my Waters games have been 1p or 2p. It stands to reason that Serene Waters might be a lot worse in higher player count England games. It's harder to pocket on bigger islands when multiple neighbors can let you down with containment breaches. And crucially, the terrible fear from Serene Waters means you're not helping to stop the Independent Resolve bonus builds. This isn't a huge deal for you personally (zero times two is zero), but I imagine the other spirits might get pretty cross. Need more data. Maybe the Serene preference is diminished a bit at higher player counts since at least Roiling pulls its weight for fear.

Habsburg Livestock Colony - Moderate With Loss Condition Pressure, Strong Serene Preference

As with Habsburg Mining, it's a huge benefit to start with an extra blight on the board. And their focus on towns specifically is great for Serene - you can downgrade lots of towns fast to make sure there's nothing to gather and nothing to give +2 damage in adjacent lands. Your blight gather is great to un-durable exactly the towns you want to do damage to - in multiplayer, make sure to ask your neighbors if they need some blight moved to a dump land.

But man, that loss condition is a killer. It's extremely hard for Waters to avoid taking a loss condition blight in the first two ravages. Draw To the Waters Edge can stop one, but they usually threaten one on both turns 2 and 3. (As a side note, you MUCH prefer to use Draw on T3 than T2 so you get the downgrade. And NEVER EVER forget or discard Draw - don't get baited by Years of Little Rain into losing the game!) I don't want to exaggerate this too much - I'm not sure I've ever *actually* lost to the loss condition - but I've done a lot of nervous planning around events and wasting actions to over handle problem lands, and I've definitely had some turns where a bad event draw would have made me lose.

If you're playing multiplayer with spirits who avoid adding any LC blight (so you can add one and still not be in danger of loss), or if you're a naturally lucky person, you can almost rank this matchup as easy. But otherwise, you need to fear the LC and that alone makes this matchup annoying. For the rest of the guide, I'm trying to continually hammer home the point "Sure, you take a couple blight, but that doesn't mean you're one step away from losing!" But with these guys it's literally printed on the card that taking one blight that's bad enough means you're one step away from losing. Bummer!

Sweden - Moderate with Chance To Swing Early, Very Strong Roiling Preference

The wretched Swedes! The Swedish double-ravage is the other force multiplier into exceptionally bad ravages that your kit doesn't have an answer for. Like Prussia, they test your early game where Waters is most pinched; but unlike Prussia, they aren't reliably solved by a small amount of effort.

But the absolute worst part is the Sweden escalation. It's terrible for so many reasons:

- It starts on the Turn 2 explore, at a time where you've only resolved 1 innate and 1 power card (maybe 2 if you did a T2 fast). You haven't had time to clump your Dahan.
- Your first healing makes your Dahan MUCH stronger than usual, so losing them is much worse than usual.
- You want your Dahan to be IN occupied lands (so you can target them with your innates and get extra value) and you want them to move INTO occupied lands (to get that value). Sweden wants Dahan to move to empty lands and stay there.

Just a mess all around. I almost always do turn 2 minor into Sweden digging for more tricks, and sometimes turn 3 needs to be a minor as well. Because you get those drafts, it's not an abysmal matchup - I'm not super formally tracking my Sweden winrate but it's somewhere north of 80% - but it's definitely got a potential for a nasty blowout the way the others don't. (If Prussia is "one thing needs to go right", Sweden is "two things need to go right".) Dig for defend and pray you find enough to get one good counterswing.

Consolation prize - Sweden is the boxer with a nasty right hook but a glass jaw. Once you resolve your first tier 2 Sanguinary Taint, the matchup swings *dramatically* in your favor. Your goal is just to get there with some dignity.

Opening

Choosing Your Board

Because you start with 4 presence on the board and your first three growths are range 2, you're pretty comfortable with any board. You can definitely let the other spirits pick their preferred boards first and go for what's left.

There is one small consideration - you don't get your blight gather until turn 2, so if you want to use Wrack with Pain and Grief or Blood Water and Bloodlust on turn 1, you can only target it from your starting lands. Here are their adjacencies:

8 Lands: A, B

7 Lands: C, D, E, F, H

6 Lands: G

So you have a slight preference for A and B and a dislike of G.

Major vs Minor Build

There are two philosophies on how you might build Waters:

1. My power budget is allocated in my innates (which benefit from more cards giving tags) and in getting to draft extra-powerful cards. I have a Reclaim 1 on my bottom track and I can get my energy from Growth 3. Draft three minors and then just spam cards. I'm a Minor Power spirit!
2. I have three mandatory drafts in the first three turns. My turn 4 growth can flex between giving me more energy or a third card play. This gives me a lot of flexibility to adapt to the Major I find, and a lot of Majors are extra- strong on me. Since my kit is so strong into efficiently solving small threats, I just need one haymaker to close it out. I'm a 1 Major First Cycle spirit!

You will want a minor turn 1, so you don't need to commit on which one to do until turn 2. But which one is better?

In matchups where you need to draft 2 or 3 minors early, it can be better to just stay on the

Minor train all game. In particular, getting to make a highly informed decision Turn 4 is a huge reason why 1 Major works well, so you don't usually want to be *drafting* a Major turn 4. You either get it Turn 2 or 3, or you wait until after Reclaim.

Into England, I think the 1 Major line is much better. You have the time and you need the value. Plus many minors are less good into England than other adversaries.

In between, there's a vast wilderness that seems to mostly be personal preference. I personally prefer 1 Major First Cycle and nearly always run it. [Qravex Wounded Waters Bleeding Guide](#) prefers the minor line. We both win a large majority of the time. Anecdotally it seems like the minor line takes a bit less blight on average (you're not spending one draft on a card to play later, so you have more chances to get strong minor hits) but takes a bit longer to win on average (the Major build makes it easier to clean up your worst lands fast). But I would need to go into the lab to be totally certain of that.

The guide that follows is for the 1 Major build, because it's what I prefer and have more experience on. It also has a lot more variables on what to do for the early turns, so it's a more useful one to have a guide for. But this is not saying that it strictly dominates the Minor build. If you find that on both Turn 2 and Turn 3 you need to draft a Minor to have something good to do, ignore the following opening and do Turn 4 G3 Bottom, Turn 5 Reclaim, Turn 6 G3 Bottom.

Turn 1

First things first - get a minor draft and plan out your life while looking at it. Since you're always drafting, you can look and see if you get lucky before planning anything. We'll go into a lot more detail on minor powers in the next section.

Your flowchart is something like:

- *Should I play nothing and scale?* Because one card play turns on an innate, this is usually not correct as Waters. There's one use case I've found so far: you're playing into England, the initial explore is such that you can't stop both lands from building, those new buildings mean that you can't stop any of the other stage 1 cards from doing both builds, and your Dahan are all in good spots already. In that very specific case, your innates don't help so you don't care that you're missing them.
- *Did I totally strike out on my first draft, getting four cards with neither animal nor water?* A total strikeout on draft means missing an innate at some point, which is a bummer. But if one of those strikeout drafts is good as a turn 1 play on your board, just play it right away so you can forget it.
- *Do I need the B2B protection of Wrack with Pain and Grief?* As mentioned above, Wrack is a very strong T1 play into Prussia because of the ½ chance of a B2B. Wrack moves enough pieces that you can get a handle on one of the B2B lands, and since it's slow you get to know which terrain matters.

- *Can Boon of Corrupted Blood kill an explorer to stop a build?* This is the default, no sliders Waters play. Nice and simple.
- *Did I draft a card with water or animal that's good turn 1?* Then play it! If you also have a valid Corrupted Blood, decide which one is better and/or which one you'd rather forget.
- *None of the above is true, and I plan to heal Serene:* You can just play a low-value Boon of Corrupted Blood so you can have something to forget. In multiplayer, this is a good time to say something like "Hey, I don't have a good Boon of Corrupted Blood but still want to play it; someone okay losing a presence to kill a town?"
- *None of the above is true, and I plan to heal Roiling:* At this point I usually just huck out Wrack with Pain and Grief even if it's not a B2B case. It'll be good somewhere and I can guarantee an animal tag. Grow into a third blighted land if you can for maximum options.

Important: Your first turn marker will often be *opposite* your planned healing, because your turn 1 card play is usually what you forget for your Major. This is fine! Just make sure your next two are the ones you want. Remember you can always use a dual card to guarantee the marker you want and still get your choice of innate.

When choosing where to grow, your flowchart is something like:

- If I need presence in a specific spot for my turn 1 play, put it there.
- Otherwise, if I'm planning to abandon one of my blighted lands to the T2 ravage, grow in an adjacent land to it so I can gather the blight next turn. This way I'm free to choose a different land T2 without being obliged to pick an adjacent one then.
- If I'm missing adjacency to one or two of my boards lands, grow to the spot with the most Dahan that sees them.
- If none of the above are true and I plan to heal Serene, try to build a bridge between my two existing lands - Serene likes a connected network much more than isolated islands.
- If none of the above are true and I plan to heal Roiling, just pick a land at range 2 for maximum coverage, ideally with Dahan in it.

When choosing which presence to destroy, pick a land that will ravage next turn if you're planning to sacrifice it, and otherwise you can pick one of your sacred sites basically at random.

For your slow innate, there's often one clearly best play to stop a build. Keep an eye out for lands where you can push/kill an explorer *and* get a Dahan into a better spot.

Turn 2

The biggest decision you have to make on turn 2 is whether you're drafting your major or not. You much prefer to draft a Major so you have full information to make the best choice on your turn 3 draft. You should usually forget your discarded power, even if the elements are great for your major - Waters is a spirit about performing *now*.

But sometimes a T2 major is too greedy. Look at the lands that are ravaging this turn and the lands that will be ravaging next turn. Plan out your current plan for turn 2 (including slow innate) and turn 3 fast. Are you keeping it to 2 blight without any side effects? Do you like those turns? If you don't like those turns, draft another minor and see if you get a better option.

Otherwise, it's another 1 card play turn so it will feel pretty similar to turn 1, except with the blight gather. Use it to stop a cascade if you can; otherwise you can give yourself more blighted land targeting or just try to clump the blight out of a land you suspect you'll abandon whenever it comes up next. As we'll see soon, dual element water/animal cards are extremely valuable on turn 3 and 4, so if you used one turn 1 try to avoid using another one now.

Turn 3 + 4

Usually you draft the opposite of your turn 2 draft (Minor if you did Major, Major if you did Minor). As mentioned before, if you need to draft a 3rd minor turn 3 because you don't like what your turn looks like without it, then ignore this whole section and just do Growth 3 bottom track next turn.

Now is the time you need to allocate your cards between turn 3 and 4. Instead of drafting for a generally good power, you're drafting specifically for the missing piece in your next-two-turn game plan. This flexibility is often the difference between thresholding a major vs not.

By default, you'll have 1 energy at the start of turn 4 (you played 4 energy worth of cards and gained 1 energy over the first few turns). **For every bonus energy you've received, and every 0 cost minor drafted (including the draft you're evaluating right now!) deduct one from the cost of your major when following this guide.**

Remember - this is skipping ahead to your turn 4, so you can decide what you're doing then, and then choose your turn 3 cards accordingly. I'll notate Growth 2 (power gain) as "G2", Growth 3 (+3 energy and add destroyed presence) as "G3", and use "T" for growing top track and "B" for growing bot track.

G3B (Major costs 3 or less, no dead cards)

This is the best spot to be in on Waters, and you often choose your Majors and Minors specifically to get here. (This is why we're doing this section before evaluating the specific powers - your first use is the most important one, so you need to be aware of these breakpoints.) You get 2 card plays turn 3 and 3 card plays turn 4. Because you're allocating those 5 cards on turn 3, and one of those cards is a draft you're doing right now, you have very

good odds of thresholding your major. Even if you don't, you can still make sure you hit the innates you want.

Important: as mentioned before, 0 cost minors count as discounts here. But for a major costing exactly 4, a 0 cost minor is doubly useful: not only does it let you do G3B, but it lets you play a third card on your reclaim turn (you'll have 2 energy and 3 card plays on your reclaim turn).

G3T (Major costs 4-6, want to play it turn 4)

This is the Sea Monsters line 😊 When you get an expensive Major, you can delay getting to 3 card plays to make sure it gets out turn 4. This line requires a dual card on both turn 3 and turn 4 to get tier 2 innate on each - so if you take an expensive major, try to avoid using a dual card unless you get another one in your drafts. Of course, Sea Monsters itself is dual...

As we'll highlight in the major powers section, for majors that can be empowered with just one other card play, G3T becomes a lot more appealing.

G2T -> G3B (You can't threshold your major with the above lines but you really want to)

You may have noticed that Sea Monsters doesn't actually get empowered in the Sea Monsters line. How sad! Well, if you really want a thresholded Sea Monsters, it's an option. On turn 4 (when you're on 1 energy, 3 cards in hand) you take another draft and grow top track. Now you're on 4 energy and 4 cards in hand. You usually have to *underplay* this turn and play only one card. Then on T5, you do G3B and you have 10 energy to play your 3 cards - this extra energy plus the one extra draft is enough to threshold most majors you're interested in. I like this line less than the other two because T4 is a bit of a fizzle, but there are plenty of board states where resolving a thresholded major ends the game outright, and if G3B alone isn't enough to do it, this gives you some extra juice to get there.

G2T -> G2B (Fine gambling on elements)

You do that underplay in G2T -> G3B because you're setting up for a specific T5 play and don't want to gamble. But maybe playing a random power you ripped off the top is fine. In that case you draft two more times, starting top track and playing two cards, and then drafting bot track and playing 3 (one of which you just ripped from the top of the deck.) Drafting 5 turns in a row is maybe too much drafting, but especially if you've forgotten a card or two from discard to help a choice event, it's something to do if you're free to.

Another reason you may play is that you did G2T with the aims of thresholding a major of cost 3 or less (which you needed a specific element combination for) and whiffed on the draft. In this case, rather than underplaying on G2T ->G3B, you pivot and play G2T -> G2B and hope you hit the second time. I don't like gambling so much on Waters since you start with so many drafts, but if you already lost the gamble, why not double down?

G2B (Major is dead, I've drafted at least one 0 cost card, and I need power NOW)

If your Major sucks and you really need to get swinging, you treat it as a dead card and rip a third minor from the top to complement the two you have left. At least one minor needs to be free for this to work well. Minors are strong on Waters so doing 3 of them and getting a tier 2 innate is better than playing a crappy Major and missing innates. You don't want to be here, but if your Major power draft is a total strikeout, it's often correct to just rip off the bandaid and ignore it. You can feed it to a different Major when you reclaim.

Once you've evaluated the above, you probably know exactly what cards you're playing Turn 4. Then work backwards and play whatever's left Turn 3. Remember that on turn 3, it takes a dual card + an on-element card to activate a tier 2 innate. Two dual cards lets you activate tier 2 of either innate in the slow phase and tier 1 of the other, which can be fun for flexibility - but only do it if you can actually spare the dual cards (which is why you're doing this up-front work to see what turn 4 needs.)

Turn 5 and Beyond

If you're doing a G2T line you already know your turn 5. Otherwise it's a reclaim right as you're choosing your second healing. This is almost always a *disgusting* turn. On three card plays, you can often maximally threshold your new fast innate because you have all your cards to choose from. You get another draft to either shore up any holes in your element profile or grab a new major to start planning your next turn. And the fact that you turned a slow innate into a fast one lets you double dip. A lot of times this is the haymaker the invaders will never recover from, and you spend the rest of the game with a nice pocket helping other spirits tidy up their boards. Or in the Serene Waiting Room digging for fear cards until the remaining explorers are convinced you will never let them have homes again.

You can take it from here! Keep looking for two-for-ones targeting lands with Dahan, and remember that using Growth 3 to unlock the reclaim 1 spot and gain 3 energy is usually better than a draft. (It's basically like drafting the best card you've seen so far and you've seen, what, twenty?)

Minor Powers

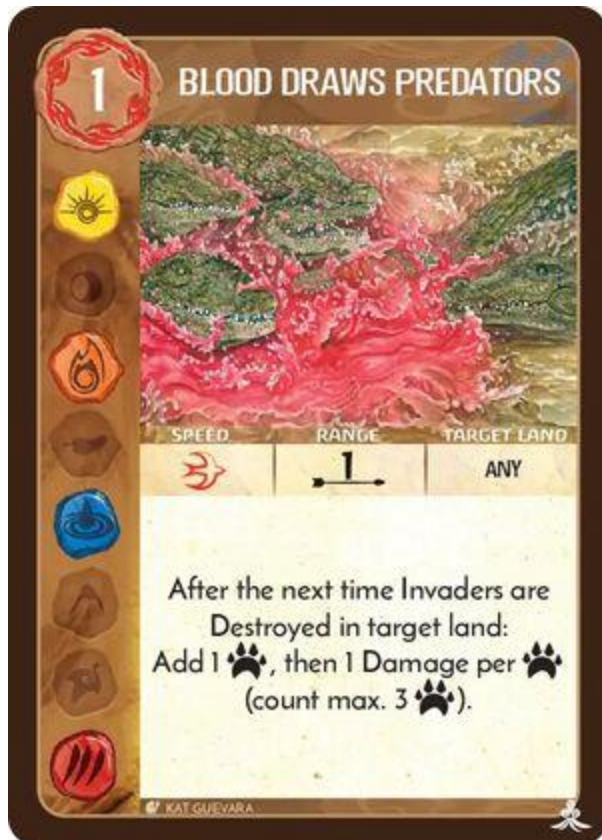
We've had to save the power evaluations for the end. Hopefully now you see why - sometimes it's very important you've drafted an extra dual card, sometimes it's very important you've drafted a free card, and you usually care a lot about which healing you're aiming towards. And your T3 draft needs to be hyper focused on the actual turns you're taking next. Waters is not a spirit who aimlessly drafts stuff based on value!

Think of the deck as being sorted into four categories of cards: dual cards, on-element cards (with the element matching your healing, but not the other one), off-element cards (lacking the element matching your healing, but with the other one), and dead cards (lacking both water and animal). If you're not committed to a specific healing yet, then you get to basically see two parallel universes and choose to live in the one where you're luckier.

Dual Cards

These are premium on Waters. You're not quite an element extremist - there are plenty of times that on-element cards with good effects trump dual cards. But a dual card is never bad, no matter your healing. So we'll look at all of them to see when they're best.

Blood Draws Predators



The premium Waters minor. It's often enough to make you heal Roiling in a matchup where you'd otherwise go Serene. The extra damage for adding the beast pushes this card into the stratosphere, and it gets sillier with all the beasts Waters can add and push.

Here's something Roiling Waters can do turn 3: mark a land with Blood Draws Predators. Slow phase, Blood Water and Bloodlust adds a beast, pinging a city. Sanguinary Taint does one more damage to that city, then adds a third beast. This kills the city, adding another beast which does another one damage ping, then adds two more damage for the two beasts, then the last damage from Taint itself is dealt. So you can kill city + town + town for the cost of two minor powers and an innate. That's not supposed to happen!

Sap the Strength of Multitudes and Mesmerized Tranquility



Waters really wants defense for the turn 2 and turn 3 ravages, before they've had chances to use tier 2 innates to solve lands. Dual element defense is as good as it gets, even if the defense on Tranquility is pretty conditional. Excellent for both healings.

Weep for What is Lost



If you're Serene, you like the pushing; if you're Roiling, you like the fire. Either way you like the 0 cost, and your blight gather makes this a lot easier to use. Excellent card!

Rain of Blood



0 cost dual element is excellent in general, but also, Serene Waters really appreciates the fear.

Teeming Rivers



Don't be fooled by the beast into thinking this is best for Roiling. This is a premium card for Waters Renew, because it has literally perfect tags to help max threshold, and max threshold is amazing on Renew. Draft this whenever you're going Renew. While I'm not really a fan of Roiling Waters Renew, Teeming Rivers makes it a much more appealing option.

Infested Aquifers



This is a pretty fiddly power, but into explorer-heavy adversaries (Russia, HME, France) it can be worth it. You usually want to combine this with Blood Water and Bloodlust to add a disease and then immediately trigger the 1 damage to each invader.

There's a pretty neat play you can do with Swirl and Spill tier 2. Suppose you have multiple adjacent lands that need explorer cleanup, but you want to wait and see the explore to decide which one. You can actually land this in any land adjacent to a blighted land with your presence. Add the disease in the target land first with Blood Water and Bloodlust. Then use Swirl and Spill Tier 2 on your own land to send two more explorers and your presence into the dump land. Now you have range 0 targeting to fry a bunch of explorers :)

Call of the Dahan Ways



There are some sad anti-synergies here. None of your uniques have moon. Replacing an invader with a Dahan is not adding or removing, so this doesn't trigger your special rule. And the target land needs to have Dahan, so you can't use this to create a 2-for-1 you didn't have before. Still, you make good use of Dahan and having more of them is useful; but this isn't quite the bomb card you want it to be.

Call to Tend



This is when we start getting into the less fun dual cards. It's a ping or a downgrade, and it's got the plant for Renew, but kinda underwhelming.

Fleshrot Fever and Scream Disease Into the Wind



Really good into HME; otherwise you're mostly just taking these for the tags.

Animal-Only Cards

Basically every animal and every water card is draftable sometimes no matter your healing. I'm just noting specific interactions or cards to take special note of - I'm not saying the cards not mentioned aren't worth taking.

Defense Cards

Carapaced Land, Quicken the Earth's Struggles, Guardian Serpents, Domesticated Animals Go Berserk, Nature's Resilience

Defense for turns 2-3 is great on Waters; these cards got it and a relevant tag. Guardian Serpents also does a ping as Roiling. Quicken is amazing into Sweden and worth the fuss of making a sacred site.

Dire Metamorphosis



This adds the beast after the badlands, so it can kill a city once you heal Roiling (1 damage, then amplify the ping for adding a beast). Since it adds strife as well, this can solve a land with city + town.

Call to Isolation



0 Cost, fast, Sun tag to help with your second healing, can always choose one ping/downgrade if there isn't a good land to clean out. Much to enjoy, better than it looks.

Pact of the Joined Hunt



This is *your* power, so with Roiling it does an extra +1 damage even if you target another spirit. Combine that with your skills at moving Dahan around, and it's easy for this power to do exactly as much damage as it needs to.

Any Fire + Animal

Savage Mawbeasts, Gold's Allure, Swarming Wasps, Territorial Strife, Call to Bloodshed, Call to Migrate, Inflame the Fires of Life, Prowling Panthers

All of these are good if you're planning to heal Waters Taste of Ruin. Notice just how many there are (and we've covered 4 others already!) Pretty easy to get a fire subtheme going, which matters for some Majors.

Skies Herald the Season of Return



This is an animal card but it's actually Serene Waters who loves this. You want as many lands as possible to have your presence for downgrades. This point and click adds destroyed presence (which you will always have) into a land, then gathers a Dahan, immediately downgrading in that land. When I get this card on Serene I often take one turn to play this alongside a dual card and do Sanguinary Taint tier 2.

Water-Only Cards

Defense Cards

Roiling Bog and Snagging Thorn, Encompassing Ward, Entrancing Apparitions, Confounding Mists, Elusive Ambushes



Same deal as the animal section; early defense cards are good. *Confounding Mists* is especially good for Serene because you can play it for defense if you need it and play it for downgrades if you don't. Nice for the escalations that add invaders; if you play this on a land that's both building and can escalate, you can push+downgrade both the built piece and the escalated piece.

Cards that move both Dahan and Invaders

Strong and Constant Currents, Call to Trade, Like Calls to Like



We showed off *Strong and Constant Currents* already, but *Call to Trade* and *Like Calls to Like* work the same way. By moving an invader and a Dahan into a land, you can downgrade one invader you move in AND one invader in that land. Note that for *Call to Trade*, you can (and often do) use this in a land that isn't ravaging just for the downgrades, but you still need to pass the "Terror Level 2 or lower" check for the town gather to work. (But you hardly ever reach Terror Level 3 as Serene. That means they spent all of Terror Level 2 with buildings on the island. Why would you let them do such a thing?)

Cards that move one piece

Twilight Fog Brings Madness, *Treacherous Waterways*, *Flow Downriver Blow Downwind*, *Song of Sanctity*

Not as good as the cards that move invaders plus Dahan, but at least all of these get the downgrade tacked on for extra value.

Poisoned Dew



We covered *Infested Aquifers* earlier; *Poisoned Dew* is also worth mentioning as a card that kills lots of explorers. The thing about being Serene is that pretty soon the only invaders left are explorers. It's nice to be able to kill them all.

Cycles of Time and Tide



Unlike *Call of the Dahan Ways*, which replaces a piece, this adds a totally new one, so it does downgrade. Given how much you like Dahan already, it's an even easier sell when adding the Dahan also downgrades a piece.

Terror Turns to Madness



As previously mentioned, Serene loves free water cards with flat fear on them.

Any Water + Plant

Gift of Power, Voracious Growth, Renewing Rain, Shore Seethes with Hatred, Thriving Chokefungus

This list seems small but it's just because we've covered tons of water + plant cards already. It's a common combination which is part of why Waters Renew is so strong.

Dead Cards

It's rare you want a dead card on Waters, since your innates are so strong and your early turns are so specifically tuned element-wise. Even normal bangers like *Gift of Constancy* aren't really worth it on this fella. Still, there are a few exceptions worth noting:

Defense Cards

Drift Down Into Slumber, Dark and Tangled Woods, Haunted by Primal Memories, Favor of the Sun and Star-Lit Dark, Call to Guard

If you hit a defend card without any good tags on the turn 1 draft, it can still be worth taking. On turn 2, draft a minor and play your defend card. Then turn 3 take a major and forget it. Missing a tier 1 innate can be okay if you get a nice counterswing in exchange. (I'm excluding *Razor-Sharp Undergrowth* from this list because it doesn't give you nice counterswings.) Remember, it's mostly just turns 2 and 3 Waters wants to defend things; don't draft dead defends outside of that window.

Turn 1 or 2 Solves

Similarly, for *turn 1 or 2 only*, if you draft four dead cards but one of them solves a land (either stopping the build or clearing it slow after it builds), it can be fine to take and play right then. Majors gotta eat something. Stuff like *Enticing Splendor* or *Lure of the Unknown* gets played here sometimes. But never do this speculatively, it's gotta be good right now. (Notably, this is almost never correct into Prussia or Sweden, where hitting innates every turn is a huge deal. If you dead draft into them, just play a card down and do G3T or G2B.)

Gift of Nature's Connection and Elemental Boon



Waters is not normally a fan of playing support cards but *Gift of Nature's Connection* is great. One tag is usually enough for you to hit a relevant threshold. Alternatively, if you target yourself on 3 card plays, you can often do your maximum innate early enough it's actually relevant. *Elemental Boon* is significantly worse because it costs 1 and can't double up one tag, but it counts as a dual card and that's never terrible.

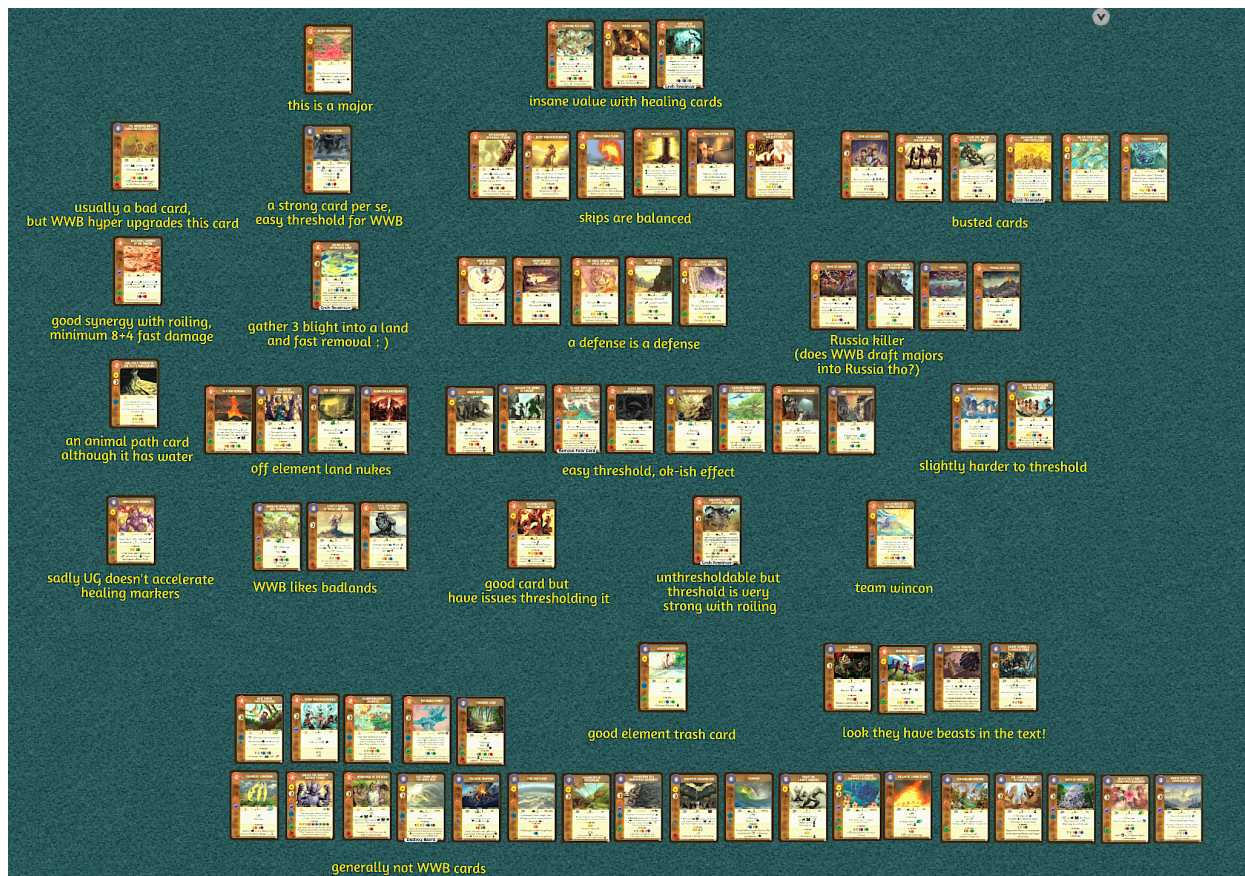
Hazards Spread Across the Island and Sear Anger Into the Wild Lands



Hazards is a 0 cost card that can copy a beast for 1 damage on roiling, copy disease you've added, or copy badlands (and Roiling Waters LOVES badlands). Sear Anger is 0 cost and adds badlands. Both of these cards have both fire and plant, which empower whichever second healing you pick. Also, since you have a split fire/plant element tag on your top track, fire/plant majors get awfully empowerable when one of these cards are kicking around. Put all of this together and you get...well, cards that are still worse than drafts that are on-element, but decently playable.

Major Powers

Gravex on the Spirit Island discord did a WWB major power categorization I agree with basically 100%. I'll go into more detail on some of the more important ones, but mostly you can just follow this image.



We'll also track two important things. First is the **G3B energy**: If you want to play this card alongside two others in a turn 4 G3B line, how much energy are you short? This is just the Majors cost minus 3, but I'll do the subtraction for you so you think about the cards the right way.

- With a G3B +1 card, you don't need to think about energy at all.
- With a G3B 0 card, you *can* play all your cards even without a 0-energy minor, but you will underplay on Turn 5 if you don't draft a 0 cost then. So it constraints your turn 5 draft a bit, but it's playable.
- With a G3B -1 card, it's much more important to draft a 0 cost minor - you need to play that minor somewhere in the first four turns AND on turn 5 to not underplay.
- G3B -2 and lower Majors means you generally can't G3B unless you got energy support from somewhere.

Second are the **threshold pairs**. Some of these majors can be thresholded with only one other minor/unique. This is very powerful because you can do G3T and still threshold. We'll call out the combos so that when you see the first half, you think about the chance of getting the second.

Flocking Red-Talons



G3B Energy: 0

Threshold Pairs: *Tormenting Rotflies, Set Them on An Ever-Twisting Trail*

The premier Roiling Waters Major; like *Blood Draws Predators*, this can get you to heal Roiling in a matchup where you'd normally do Serene. This power has bonkers range and affects a large number of invaders - the balancing factor is supposed to be that the invaders each only take 1. But when Roiling adds some true damage on top of it, it escapes the realm of balance.

It's even better with the repeat; I will often do G2T lines digging for the minors to empower it if I didn't get them early. With a repeat, you kill a city in the origin with the three pings, do one damage to 3 towns (or more if there were additional beasts in the land to begin with), then push those towns to an adjacent land. You repeat in that adjacent land, doing 3 more damage (killing another city), then finishing off the three towns. That's 12 health of invaders dead in the fast phase for 3 energy at 3(!) range and fast speed. Pretty nuts.

Tigers Hunting



G3B Energy: +1

Threshold Pairs: *Guardian Serpents, Skies Herald the Season of Return*

The 2 cost is lovely and flexible; this is always fine to G3B. The no-blight restriction is much less relevant because you can gather it out. And with Roiling it does a bonus 2 damage in the origin and a bonus 2 damage in the destination. It lacks the crazy range of Flocking Red-Talons (the origin terrain restriction is much more annoying on a range 1 than a range 3) , but this is still S-Tier for Roiling.

Bargain of Coursing Paths



G3B Energy: Bargain makes this weird, just do G3T
Threshold Pairs: None

The premier Serene Waters major. It's hard to threshold this without help and it usually forces you to go top track before bottom, but the value is simply absurd. No matter who pushes an invader into your Bargain of Coursing Paths land, it's *your* power, so you get to downgrade one piece for every group of invaders being added or moved. If you are the one doing the move, you get to *double downgrade*. Let's say you *Draw To the Waters Edge* in a Coursing Paths land. You gather two towns, downgrading one into an explorer. Then you move the gathered pieces into any one of Waters' lands with Coursing Paths (including the same Coursing Path land), downgrading the other town in the process.

And remember this works with *anything* that adds pieces, not just spirit powers. You get to downgrade the stuff that builds! In particular, this does an exceptional job at handling escalations that add invaders, because you know the conditions in advance and can prepare for them. Let's go down the list:

- Prussia: If your Coursing Path land has no towns, Prussia's escalation becomes "add one explorer in one of Waters' lands."

- England: If your Coursing Path land is tied for most buildings and will next build a town before a city (remember you can choose your downgrades to engineer this state), England's escalation becomes "add one explorer in one of Waters' lands."
- Russia: If your Coursing Path land has beast (easy to achieve with Blood Water and Bloodlust or Swirl and Spill tier 2), Russia's escalation becomes "add one explorer in one of Waters' lands".
- France: If the terrain of your Coursing Path land comes up on the explore and there are no buildings in it, France's escalation becomes "add one explorer in one of Waters's lands".
- Habsburg Livestock Colony: If your Coursing Path land has no town or blight, HLC escalation becomes "add one explorer in one of Waters' lands." (If you have 2 or fewer blight, note that you have to add the real town to the same land as the one you use for the downgrade.)
- Habsburg Mining Colony: If your Coursing Path terrain isn't building or ravaging, you get to fizzle one explore by immediately downgrading the explorer.
- Sweden: The explorer into the Coursing Path land is just downgraded; doesn't convert even if there was only one Dahan.
- Scotland: You get to replace the town in your Coursing Path land with an explorer in any of your lands. Note that in multiplayer, if your board took the Scotland escalation as Serene Waters, you probably made several mistakes.

Because of this value with escalations, in multiplayer games, you usually want the second Coursing Path land to be on a different board, so two boards get this protection. Each build/escalation is a separate action so you get to do the Serene downgrade each time. You may have noticed how many pieces become Explorers when this gets going: cards dealing 1 damage to each invader go up in priority a lot.

Remember that you have to choose the same destination land for all of the pieces moved by one instance of *Bargain of Coursing Paths*, and it has to be your land to get a downgrade. Make sure you've got presence in a spot that can handle the extras for multi-moves.

A word of warning: if you were planning to heal Roiling but then see this in the offer, be careful about picking this and pivoting to Serene. Sometimes you want to heal Roiling specifically because Serene is too slow. Coursing Paths makes Serene's value even more ridiculous, but it doesn't make it much *faster*; this can be a bait card in those games. But any time you want to heal Serene, this is the strongest way to do it.

The Wounded Wild Turns on It's Assailants



G3B Energy: -1

Threshold Pairs: None on turn 4. With your plant/fire tag unlocked, any plant/fire card

Sleeper hit that gets a *lot* better on Waters. Roiling Waters ends up with tons of fire anyway, loves having badlands on the map, and gets 2 extra damage from the gather. Even Serene is decently happy with this. Your blight gather makes it easy to get 2-3 blight in a land for even more damage. Since the threshold is just for fear, I usually play this unempowered the first time, then grow top to my Plant/Fire tag and empower it on the second play.

Sea Monsters



G3B Energy: -2

Threshold Pairs: None

A Major everyone loves that also has both your elements on it. Don't get fooled by the beast icon into thinking this is Roiling specific - Roiling only adds 1 more damage on a power that generally overkills the land it's in. Both flavors of Waters love this. Nice to pair it with Blood Water and Bloodlust to get 3 more damage. Before working too hard to empower this, check what the second use would even be - oftentimes getting one use faster is better than setting up an extra turn to get 2, because only one land has enough plastic to even justify it.

Infestation of Venomous Spiders



G3B Energy: -1

Threshold Pairs: *Dire Metamorphosis*

Skips are very strong for everyone in Spirit Island. Waters has an especially keen interest because they don't have any but are very good at "fighting fair" - meaning that their board is often "one land in rough shape and seven that are totally fine". With a skip card, a B2B on your rough land goes from "the only thing that could potentially make me sweat" into "free game".

Infestation is the best of the bunch because it gives you the animal tag and works well with all the beasts you're flinging around. Like with Sea Monsters, don't get pigeonholed into thinking this a Roiling-specific card - all you lose out on is 2 damage worth of pings, which is not what makes or breaks this card. You really want your air and earth to be on the *same* minor if you draft this - you can get that third animal from all sorts of places, but having the earth and air on separate cards means you have to take a very specific turn to threshold this.

Solidify Echoes of Majesty Past



G3B Energy: -1

Threshold Pairs: *Guardian Serpents*

Quite an idiosyncratic skip card for Waters. It has almost none of the tags you want and it's a skip card that can't handle B2Bs, the thing you want them for most. However, it scales with destroyed presence, which you have a lot of! I tend not to draft this if I'm doing well, but it's an amazing out if you're on the back foot. Better on Serene because instantly expanding your presence network is also a big deal. Generally speaking you shouldn't throw good money after bad trying to get the tags to threshold this if those cards don't have the tags for your healing. This card is plenty good without threshold and unless you randomly stumble on Serpents it's often correct to pretend threshold doesn't exist. (Unless you're in multiplayer and begging for an *Elemental Boon* 😊)

The Other Skips

Sleep and Never Waken, Infinite Vitality

Good because skips are good, and relevant tag.

Indomitable Claim, Paralyzing Fright

Bad tags, great effects. Solid B-tier pickups.

Flow Like Water, Reach Like Air



G3B Energy: +1

Threshold Pairs: Any air card (!)

Of all of the cards in “busted cards”, this deserves special consideration. Dead easy to threshold, fits great into G3B. Since it’s your power, even if you move another spirit’s presence, you still get to downgrade as Serene as long as they move into one of your lands. This is a great card in tandem with isolates to create pockets.

The Other Busted Cards

Pent-Up Calamity, Vigor of the Breaking Dawn

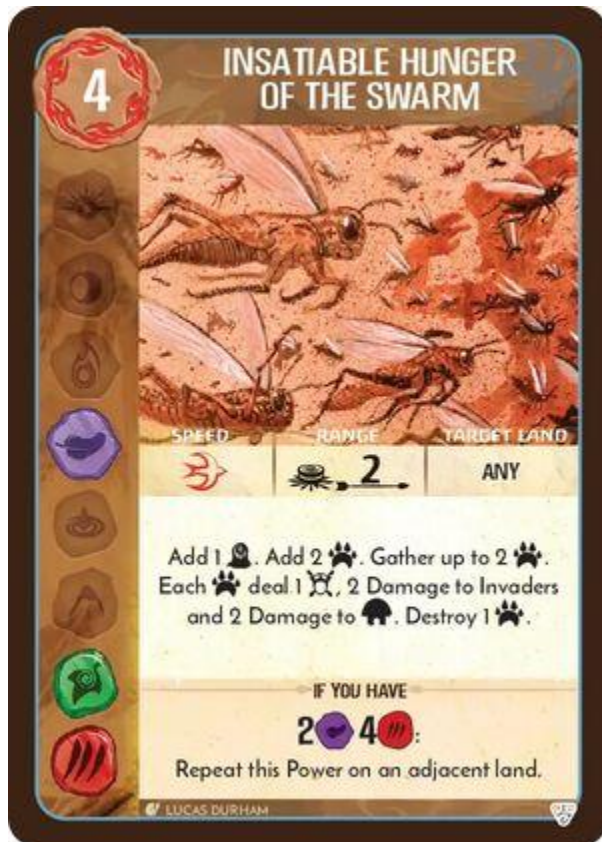
Strong majors that don’t synergize especially well with Roiling (though Vigor does do +1 damage with threshold), but are just really strong and at least have an animal tag.

Bargains of Power and Protection, Weave Together the Fabric of Place, Powerstorm

Three powerful majors that are kind of clunky for Waters to play, but strong enough to be worth it sometimes. *Bargains of Power and Protection* adds a whole extra dimension to all that Dahan

movement you do. It's kinda like a boat in that you're really happy when it's your friend paying for it instead of you, but sometimes you regrettably have to be the one to buy it.

Insatiable Hunger of the Swarm



G3B Energy: -1

Threshold Pairs: None

Okay, this time your eyes do not deceive you - this one is a Roiling-only special. Threshold is a bit annoying but because each cast adds blight, once is often plenty. Your blight gather means you can avoid cascading with this. This power does **twelve** damage - 4 pings, then 8 damage for the 4 beasts. An excellent gut shot to close out the game after you've used Afflict with Bloodthirst to put everyone in one land.

Angry Bears



G3B Energy: 0

Threshold Pairs: **Blood Water and Bloodlust**, any fire + animal

Love to have a card that's thresholded by a starter card. Not only that, but Blood Water Bloodlust is the perfect complement to this - you add the beast directly before using it for one ping, then do 4 more damage before pushing the beast to deal a ping and kill an explorer or town. Unfortunately, range 0 slow is a meaningful downside - Roiling Waters controls wide swaths of territory and it's honestly a bit rare for a land with your presence to need this much help in the slow phase. It's definitely a power you plan for a specific land, not a "let's play it and see" slow power. Still, this ALSO has perfect tags for Afflict with Bloodthirst, so you can kind of make your own target by pushing a bunch of towns into one of your lands fast and then hitting it with Angry Bears slow.

Plague Ships Sail to Distant Ports



G3B Energy: -1

Threshold Pairs: **Blood Water and Bloodlust**, Weep for What is Lost, Fleshrot Fever, Blood Draws Predators

Another threshold by a starting Unique, which is much more relevant for a G3B -1 card; it means that you can do G3T and still be guaranteed the threshold. The existence of the card is a big reason I don't like playing Blood Water and Bloodlust turn 1. Good for both healings.

Unfortunately, because this is fast and Blood Water and Bloodlust is slow, you can't use the disease from Blood Water and Bloodlust to pay for the fear remove. If that's going to be a problem, consider G2T -> G3B (or even G2T -> G3T!) to get spending money. The fear card removal is really worth it. On Serene it gets you out of the Serene Waiting Room; on Roiling it accelerates you to Terror Level 3. In multiplayer games, as soon as you draft this, see if you can conscript a spirit to start saving up energy.

One funny consideration - Waters is so good at killing/downgrading cities that after you resolve this and blow up the city, there often aren't any coastal cities left by the time you want to recast. Make sure to allow a coastal land to build up if you're planning to use this again.

Dissolve the Bonds of Kinship



G3B Energy: -1

Threshold Pairs: **Blood Water and Bloodlust**, Weep for What is Lost, Fleshrot Fever, Blood Draws Predators

Identical threshold and cost to *Plague Ships Sail to Distant Ports*. Unfortunately a worse card. With Serene you can downgrade one of the explorers which is probably the least relevant application of your special rule ever. If there's a big-ass land you wanna make smaller, remember that this is a major you can empower with G3T, which means it's definitely not a whiff, even if there are much better hits.

Settle Into Hunting Grounds



G3B energy: 0

Threshold Pairs: **Wrack with Pain and Grief**, any plant +animal. Once you've unlocked your fire/plant, any animal (!)

Unfortunately this has no direct Roiling synergy at all; Roiling only triggers when you move or add beasts. This doesn't count as adding beasts, and it's literally printed that you can't move your presence. Sad!

However there is a very strong second-order Roiling synergy - roiling loves badlands and now you are the badland. All of your lands should be empty by the end of the turn you use this power. If you're doing well, this is not actually a huge benefit; you can usually do that anyway and this loses the flexible range that characterizes Roiling. But if you're behind, this'll put you back on an even keel in a hurry.

Ravaged Undergrowth Slithers Back to Life



G3B Energy: 0

Threshold Pairs: **Wrack with Pain and Grief**, any plant + water. With your Fire/Plant tag unlocked, any water (!)

Nothing about this card is amazing but it has tons of little advantages that add up. Your blight gather means you can aim this wherever you need to. It has great elements. You can either squeak it into a G3B line or threshold it on a G3T line and have energy to spare. It helps create pockets, which both flavors of Waters are good at holding. If you're Serene, you can downgrade one of the pushed towns to pocket even more. It's not quite S-tier but I'm never upset I drafted this, even on Roiling. It's a very flexible Major, which is nice for a spirit as flexible as Waters — no matter what your gameplan is, this will fit in it.

Inspire the Release of Stolen Lands



G3B Energy: -1

Threshold Pairs: None, but a threshold triple with **Draw to the Waters Edge** and **Boon of Corrupted Blood**

The three sun is clunky, but almost always possible to threshold (especially since Sun has lots of pickable 0-cost cards, meaning you can often G3B this), and you'd be surprised how much resolving this card is worth it. Don't think of this as a Serene card - you're almost certainly going to have more removal than you need, so one more downgrade in the origin isn't that relevant. But you get to remove a blight, TOTALLY clear out a land, and then take plastic off a neighbor to make sure it stays clear. If you could warp to every game where I resolved a thresholded Inspire and stack every deck against me, I'm still pretty sure I would never lose. Sleeper OP for sure.

Exaltation of the Incandescent Sky



G3B Energy: -4 (lol)

Threshold Pairs: Also lol. Lmao even.

What the hell is this guy doing here? It doesn't look like a Waters power at all. You're right, it isn't. But in many games (especially 2-3p), resolving Exaltation often just wins the game on the spot. So it's worth noting by going G3T and drafting at least one 0 cost card, Waters can play this turn 4 fast. Paying this much for a bad element major is not usually worth it on Waters unless it wins you the game, but well, Exaltation often does. So be aware you have the option!

Good Spirits to Pair with Wounded Waters

As mentioned, this guide focuses on self-sufficiency because many people are wrong about Waters needing support and it's important to show how well they do without it. But here are some notable friendships.

Many Minds Move as One

Many Minds can move beasts all over the place; Waters creates lots of beasts and doesn't need too many of them to stick around. One of those synergies that's really as obvious as it looks. Many Minds covers early defense and then they both just run roughshod over the game.

Sharp Fangs Behind the Leaves

A bit less insane than the Many Mind synergy, because Fangs cares more about beasts in a particular place, and Waters really does not need help cleaning lands they've added Beasts to already. But it's still not bad to have lots of beasts kicking around and the blight gather can be a big help.

Fractured Days Split the Sky

Isn't this just saying that everyone is good with Fractured? Yeah kind of. But there's one specific thing to note. Waters in the first couple of turns can efficiently clean up a couple of small lands but not solve a big one. Fractured gets a huge Days that Never Were pool to look at. If you have Waters and Fractured sharing a border, they can usually work together to totally solve one of their two boards. This makes Pour Time Sideways *amazing* as a turn 2 play. It gets Waters out of the one area they're bad at, and then they can do lots of work on Fractured board in the future with all of the tempo they gained.

Vengeance as a Burning Plague

The Waters blight gather is amazing but sometimes struggles to find use on later turns. Vengeance can always use it as a badlands and that can unlock a lot of cool, powerful plays.

Keeper of the Forbidden Wilds and Heart of the Wildfire

For both of these spirits, Spirit-phase blight gathering makes them a lot more flexible.

Grinning Trickster Stirrs Up Trouble

The combination of Boon of Corrupted Blood and Overenthusiastic Arson Turn 1 Fast can instantly create a substantial pocket.

Shifting Memory of Ages

Element tags are *incredibly* useful for Waters, much more so than card plays or free drafts. They let you cheat the timing of your innates and either cover for bad drafts or reach higher tiers much more quickly. Memory can give Waters some incredible highs, and Waters in turn can help handle their small stuff so they can focus on playing huge majors.

Any “Major Power” spirit

Speaking of, that pattern of “I’ll handle the small stuff and you do big plays” is just generally a good way to be a neighbor as Waters. Remember, you are one of the most action efficient spirits in Spirit Island; you can solve small problems with small investment. So it’s great to sneak across your borders and solve other peoples small problems so the high energy, low card play spirits can use their card plays on big problems.

Any spirit that gives energy

You probably noticed in that opening section how incredibly energy-starved Waters is early. A single gifted energy makes a huge difference and you should be fairly shameless asking for it. If you get one Gift of Constancy it can smooth out any bad draft luck.

Any feedback?

Comments are enabled. Feel free to comment directly in the doc or tag me (_hito) in the #analysis-and-strategies channel of the Spirit Island discord.

I hope that this helps move the conversation away from Waters being a little guy who needs assistance to scale and “fully heal” before coming online. Waters is one of the most action efficient spirits in the game - play with confidence and victory will follow.

This is a free guide so I feel entitled to a bit of self-promotion. If you got this far, it seems like you like how I explain things, so I humbly request you take a look at my [Substack](#) :)