

INTRO

Good morning gamers! I'm trash_lapras and Hades is a really fun game that I love to speedrun so I'm putting together this guide to help give you a starting point for speedrunning any aspect in the game.

We're going to be covering what builds to go for when speedrunning sword aspects. First we'll talk about mirror setups, hammers, builds that apply to multiple aspects and weapons (Global Builds) which includes keepsakes, hermes options, core boons, and supplementary boons. And then we'll go over aspect specifics, like which global build is best for them and how they interact with it, as well as any other viable builds. We're not going to go too far into detail on gameplay, but there are plenty of other in-depth guides around and I'll provide links to those where relevant.

A note: I'm making one of these guides for every weapon and covering every aspect. A lot of them use the same or similar builds, and I'll be including that info in every guide necessary. If you're looking at more than one of these guides, you might be getting info you've already seen. It's likely going to be exactly the same or have very minor changes, use it as a refresher or skip ahead if you want.

MIRROR OF NIGHT

Before we jump into the first build let's go over the standard mirror setup. You can take this as the default setup for every aspect unless mentioned otherwise. The setup is as follows:

Fiery Presence
Chthonic Vitality
Death Defiance
Greater Reflex
Boiling Blood
Infernal Soul
Deep Pockets
High Confidence
Family Favorite
Dark Foresight
God's Pride
Fated Persuasion

The most flexible one of these is between Infernal Soul and Stygian Soul and there are benefits to both, but generally Infernal Soul provides more utility. One thing to note is that while High Confidence is better than Thick Skin, if you're still getting comfortable with the game or learning a new aspect and want the extra safety, Thick Skin is usually fine. Other than that, most of these will stay consistent, save for specific builds.

SWORD HAMMERS

The best hammer to take on Sword is Double Edge since your primary means of attacking will be using dash strikes and Double Edge literally doubles that and then some. Other good hammers include Piercing Wave and Breaching Slash which give you some benefits but not nearly as much as Double Edge.

There are a few hammers that you will want to avoid entirely. These are Dash Nova, Cursed Slash, Flurry Slash, and World Splitter. Using the Special is a key part of the sword's bread and butter damage sequence and Dash Nova makes it almost impossible to control. Cursed Slash seems decent in theory but doesn't allow you to heal off of dash strikes, so it becomes just a straight nerf to your health. Flurry Slash and World Splitter have a tendency to add extra attacks to the end of your dash combo which can cause your timings to get thrown off easily. With enough practice and precision you can minimize the negatives on these two, but it's best to just not try it unless you have to.

All the other hammers are either minor inconsequential buffs, or provide exactly zero value.

GLOBAL BUILDS: MERCIFUL END

Good on: Zagreus Sword, Nemesis, Poseidon

Now we can finally get into the first Global Build for Sword: Merciful End, or "ME" for short. Merciful End is the duo boon between Ares and Athena that allows you to proc doom damage with your deflect boons. It focuses on Ares' doom attack which does big damage after a delay, but allows you to cut that delay to almost no time at all. It's one of the strongest boons and doesn't rely on any specific hammer to get going, but it does come at the cost of being hard to get and usually requires several resets just to get a run going. Despite this drawback, Merciful End is arguably the best build for sword.

Core Boons

The core boons you want for an ME build are Ares attack, Athena special, and Athena dash. When you have the full build, it allows you to dash strike into enemies, tagging them with doom and proccing it almost instantly with the dash deflect.

To achieve this build you want to start with Ares' keepsake and take his attack. You might think that since we need two Athena boons we should start with Athena keepsake, but there are a few reasons to start with Ares. First, is that we want to get as many poms into our doom attack as possible, so having it from the start gives us the best chance of that happening, while poms into Athena's boons have little benefit. The second reason is for doom rarity. While it's definitely possible to get great times with common doom, it's only 50 damage, while rare is 75 and epic is 100. This is a huge difference, and when going for top times, most runners will reset runs where rare or epic doom is not offered.

The second boon you'll want to pick up is Athena special. This is the only boon that will open up the Merciful End, so while it's much less effective at proccing doom than Athena's dash, you'll want to prioritize the special first. Ideally you can find the special naturally in Tartarus, but in a worst-case scenario, you can take Athena's keepsake into Asphodel to force the special. Hopefully though, you've found Athena special already and you'll be taking Athena's keepsake in hopes of finding Merciful End on your next boon. If merciful end isn't offered on your second Athena Boon, you can also just take Divine Dash, since it's a necessary part of the build, and hope to find ME on your next Athena or Ares boon.

So to recap you want to start with Ares' attack, grab Athena special next, then Merciful End, followed by Athena's dash.

Supplementary Boons

There's one main supplementary boon you want to find on a Merciful End build, and that's Impending Doom. Impending Doom provides a damage boost to your doom attacks at the costs of taking longer to proc, but you'll already be negating the delay with Merciful End, so it's purely a buff at that point. This does mean that your DPS will take a hit before you find ME, but Impending Doom is valuable enough once you do have ME that it's worth it. Impending Doom is also your secondary pom target, once you've got a few into your attack. The only other boon that really deserves a mention is Dire Misfortune. Dire Misfortune doesn't do anything for your damage once you have ME, but it can help a little before you get it. It's not worth going out of your way for, but can be nice to have.

We haven't mentioned a Cast or a Call boon yet because they're not very important to an ME build, but if you do take one, try to make sure it doesn't open up additional duo boons, at least until after you've found Merciful End.

Hermes

There are two main options for Hermes:

- Hyper Sprint + Rush Delivery (Hyper Delivery)
- Greatest Reflex (+dashes)

Hyper Delivery takes the 100% move speed of Hyper Sprint and turns it into damage with Rush Delivery, which pairs well with ME's doom attack. The downside is that it requires two boons, and you can't get Rush Delivery until after Hyper Sprint.

Greatest Reflex on the other hand gives you more dashes, which means more doom procs. Even just common Reflex is significant, and it's arguably just as effective as Hyper Delivery, while being much easier to get.

A third option would be to take Greater Haste and then Rush Delivery, but only if the first two options aren't offered.

Other Keepsakes

Aside from the ones mentioned already, a few other keepsakes can help your build:

- Coin Purse*: the main reason to take the coin purse (usually in elysium) would be if you've used both Ares and Athena keepsakes already and still need pieces of the build. Coin Purse can help ensure you're able to purchase a boon in the shop if what you need is offered.

-*Hades*: Hades' call is a very powerful keepsake in the second half of the game as it can provide a burst of damage, great for bosses and chunky enemies.

-*Acorn*: Acorn allows you to maintain aggression in boss fights while maintaining safety. It also helps you maintain the 25% bonus damage from High Confidence.

Wrap Up

That's it for how to build Merciful End on Sword. There are a lot of great examples of this build in the top times on the SRC leaderboard, and you can even see this build in Fresh File runs, just with one less dash.

ASPECT SPECIFICS:

ZAGREUS SWORD

With that covered we can jump into the first aspect, Zagreus Sword. Zag Sword's perk is that it provides you with 15% extra movement speed and attack speed. This can make for a nice feel of the weapon, but it doesn't greatly influence the build. Because of the attack combo with quick dash strikes, Zag Sword's best build is Merciful End, which I mentioned earlier.

Zag sword and hermes

The place where Zag Sword's bonus comes into play is with Hermes options. The extra movement speed makes Rush Delivery an even better choice. This even makes Greater Haste a more viable option for opening Rush Delivery.

That's the extent of Zag Sword specifics. It's the starting weapon for a reason!

NEMESIS

The aspect of nemesis is the fastest sword in the game. Its perk gives you 30% crit chance on your attack for 4 seconds after every special. Crit damage is one of the few sources of multiplicative damage in the game, so having this inherent chance provides significant extra damage, even when running the same builds as other swords.

Nemesis also runs the Merciful End build very well, and while the aspect's crit chance doesn't affect the build directly, it can help with damage while you're assembling the parts needed. However, the crit damage does allow you to play other builds as well:

Crit Build

Crit build goes all in on Nemesis' aspect bonus, increasing crit chance with Artemis' attack, and buffing that damage even further with Heart Rend, the duo boon between Artemis and Aphrodite, while getting as many attack buffs as possible. This build can be very fun and is probably the most "pure sword gameplay" build, but it does rely entirely on the Double Edge hammer, which only has about a 30% chance of even showing up.

To start, you want to take Artemis' keepsake for her attack boon. This gives you 45% crit chance with Nemesis' buff and it also opens up Hunter's Mark which can take that crit chance well above 60% even at common rarity. The next boon you'll want to pick up is Aphrodite's

special. This will open up Heart Rend, increasing your crits by 150% against enemies that have weak applied to them. With the sword's "special > dash strike > dash strike" combo, this allows you to easily apply weak and follow up with big crits. On top of the boons already mentioned, you'll also want to pick up Hunter Dash from Artemis for extra dash strike damage.

Additionally, you'll be wanting to pick up as much attack and dash strike damage as you can from Chaos boons. These can range anywhere from ~30% to over 110% extra damage and they can make or break the build.

As I mentioned earlier, double edge is absolutely critical to the build as well, and you'll want to pick it up as soon as possible, and usually reset if it's not offered on your first hammer. It doubles your attack damage, so it's that important.

For supplementary boons, Hydraulic Might is one of the best. 10s is a long time in Hades and it gives about as much damage as a good Chaos boon. You can also add in Zeus call and pick up Lightning Rod or Smoldering Air. In some cases, you can also take Aphrodite's dash instead of Artemis'. This sacrifices some dash strike damage but allows for easier application of weak for Heart Rend.

Hermes

Hermes options are:

- Greatest Reflex
- Hyper Delivery (Hyper Sprint + Rush Delivery)

For the crit build, Greatest Reflex is as good as it gets. This build is all about the dash strikes, so more dashes gives you more of everything you want. While having extra dashes may be hard to control at first, their value is unmatched. Hyper Delivery is still a good option if Greatest Reflex doesn't show, but it's definitely less effective.

Keepsakes

After starting with Artemis, you want to take Aphrodite's keepsake into Asphodel for either her special or Heart Rend. Following that your options are:

- Zeus: Call pairs well with the build and opens great duos. Take into elysium if you have your full build already
- Hourglass: If there is attack jerky in the midbiome well
- Acorn: A melee weapon without Divine Dash can be very dangerous. Also allows you to play more aggressively against bosses and maintain High Confidence
- Hades Call: If you have everything else you need and you're not worried about safety, Hades call can provide a nice bump in damage when it's charged.

Recap

So to recap, you want Double Edge, Artemis attack, Aphrodite Special, Heart Rend, Hunter's Mark, Artemis Dash, and as much Attack/Dash Strike from Chaos as possible. As you can tell, it's a lot, and it's not all easy to get. For this reason, the crit build has fallen out of favor over time and is mostly only run in modded runs where you can guarantee Double Edge. Even then it's still less popular than other builds, but at its peak, crit build can perform just as well.

Splash Dash

There's also sort of a third build for Nemesis that involves starting with Poseidon's Tidal Dash (aka Splash Dash) and then essentially building into as much of the crit build as possible. It may seem counterintuitive to use Splash Dash which knocks enemies away on a melee weapon, and it kind of is, but the short of it is that Splash Dash is just that good of a boon and if you're practiced enough you can still use your dash strikes effectively.

I hesitate to even recommend it in this guide because it can be very difficult to play well and requires a lot of game knowledge to build effectively, but it's also currently the most popular build and at its peak is as good as any other build.

Splash Dash has high base damage and a knockback that can cause wall slams for even more damage. This makes Tartarus and Styx much easier to deal with, and it gives you access to Poseidon's great tier-2 boons like Breaking Wave and Razor Shoals. You still want to get as much dash strike and attack damage as possible, as well as Hunter's Mark and all the other boons that go well with the crit build.

One of the main differences and why this build originally gained popularity is that it's not totally reliant on Double Edge, since Splash Dash's damage can carry your build for a while. This means that a bad Splash Dash build will still be better than a bad crit build. Additionally, since it takes a lot less to get going, you'll be resetting less than when going for the Merciful End Build. So while it can be difficult to play at first, once you're comfortable with it, it's generally seen as the most reliable build, while still having very high peaks.

A last note on Hermes options for the Splash Dash build: while Rush Delivery is good but not great on the crit build, RD is fantastic on Splash Dash and typically takes priority over Greatest Reflex (which is still great).

That wraps up Nemesis specifics. All three of the builds can be great fun to play, hope you find at least one that you enjoy!

POSEIDON

The aspect of Poseidon gives you +50% damage to your casts, you can also dislodge casts from enemies when you hit them with your special. It looks pretty cool and the best build is Merciful End. For the same reason as the other sword aspects, ME works great with Poseidon, and it's perks are just an added bonus. But there's at least one other build that can be run and that actually takes advantage of the aspects uniqueness.

Lightning Phalanx

Once upon a time the Poseidon build was Zeus cast and Exit Wounds from Artemis. Nowadays we play Electric Shot's chonkier cousin: Lightning Phalanx. This build centers around Athena's Phalanx Shot which has high enough base damage to one-shot a lot of enemies, and surprisingly decent aoe. Combine that with the Athena-Zeus duo boon and you've got a build that will destroy mobs and bosses.

This build is one of the few that runs God's Legacy, instead of God's Pride on the Mirror of Night, since it's built around a duo boon and there are other great duos and legendaries that you can easily build into. Infernal Soul is also required since your primary damage will come

from your casts. And since casting is most of the work, hammers are flexible. The good hammers are still good and the bad ones are still bad.

You'll want to start with Athena's keepsake and take Phalanx Shot right away. You'll want to get as many poms into it as you can, and as soon as possible. From there you'll need to find a Zeus boon. Call is the best, but Special is good as well. Dash and Attack aren't recommended but they will still open up Lightning Phalanx if you need them to. For additional damage scaling, you'll want to pick up Chaos cast boons. Both the Shot (+% damage) and Grasp (extra cast stone) options are great.

Supplementary options usually depend on what other god's you find naturally along the way. If you have both Artemis and Poseidon, Mirage Shot is great. If you only find Artemis, Exit Wounds is great, and if you can turn that into Fully Loaded, it's even better. If you find Aphrodite, Smoldering Air Zeus Call is great, and Parting Shot is nice especially if you also pick up Blinding Flash. It's also worth noting that you'll want to still use the usual sword combo in between casts, and as such, if you luck into a plethora of Athena boons and Ares, you can even build into Merciful End at the same time.

Hermes

Your best options are:

- Hyper Delivery (Hyper Sprint + Rush Delivery)
- Flurry Cast
- Greater Recall

Hyper Delivery is great as always, and Greatest Reflex is ok, but Poseidon is in a unique position where Flurry Cast is a great option. Casting normally can be really slow and Flurry Cast speeds that up. Phalanx Shot also has a tendency to do its own thing and fly off into corners and Hermes' Legendary boon Greater Recall makes it to where you don't have to worry about collecting your casts all the time.

Keepsakes

Athena and Zeus keepsakes make the build and after that there are a few options:

- Artemis/Poseidon/Aphrodite: if you're close to one of the supplementary options, taking one of these keepsakes will help
- Hourglass: Wells have great options for cast builds. Braids add 50% damage and Cast stones are great as well. Hourglass can help these last into Styx or even the Hades fight
- Hades: great burst of damage as always
- Acorn: Safety and High Confidence

Recap

Start with Phalanx Shot, take Zeus and find Lightning Phalanx. Get lots of poms into your cast, find some Chaos buffs if possible, and grab some other duo boons if possible.

ARTHUR

Arthur is... different. As a hidden aspect, it has a reworked kit featuring big, chunky attacks and a special that covers a huge area and disables traps while also reducing damage if

you stand in it. Additionally, Arthur gives you an extra 50hp, and despite that sounding safe, you'll probably need it since it attacks much slower than other swords. Because Arthur's dash strike is different from normal swords, it means that other sword builds don't really work. Merciful End is technically usable but it's difficult to get efficient procs since you can't do the usual combo. This has all led to Arthur having one of the less-solved metas in Hades speedrunning. People have tried everything from crit build, to starting Aphrodite attack, focusing on Smoldering Air, or the Lightning Phalanx build that Poseidon sword uses, even starting Thunder Dash and building into Splitting Bolt. These have all found various levels of success and the build I'm listing here is just the one I find most reliable. Feel free to experiment and find what works for you.

The Build

First, we should talk about hammers. Despite the difference in playstyles, Double Edge is still your best hammer. Arthur's dash strike can be hard to aim but it is quick and does good enough damage to make it your primary damage dealer. If you don't find Double Edge, Shadow Slash is a hammer that can be tough to use, but provides massive value when used correctly. If you end up taking it, you'll want to focus on using your normal attack more, since Shadow Slash doesn't apply to dash strikes. Arthur has neat tech where you can dash while your big swings are winding up, so you can use your dash to deal damage in between. Now onto your boons:

For this build, you'll want to start with Tidal Dash from Poseidon. Tidal Dash is maybe the single best boon in the game, providing high damage, good aoe, as well as knockback effects and great tier-2s, so it only makes sense to slap it on aspect that doesn't seem to inherently work with any of the typical builds. Splash Dash helps Arthur's slow attacks since you can get good damage and aoe as fast as you can dash, cleaning up smaller things in Tartarus. While the knockback can be hard to deal with on other swords, Arthur has good range to mitigate that.

Arthur has a chunky attack, so you'll be wanting a good attack boon as well. In the past, Artemis was the go-to because crits give you the biggest number, but over time we realized that crits are unreliable, often not doing enough to kill things and at other times doing massive overkill. So we've adjusted to just going for the biggest percentage boon you can get. Aphrodite is your best option, with epic rarity going up to 100%, but Athena and Demeter can also be good at epic rarity. If you are struggling to find a good attack boon, the Shattered Shackle keepsake is also a good pick for the 100% buff with no boon.

Supplementary Boons

As I mentioned before, Poseidon Dash opens up some really great tier-2 boons. Breaking Wave can destroy entire biomes, Razor Shoals is great for finishing off stragglers, and Hydraulic Might is an excellent attack boost for the first 10s of every chamber. Depending on your attack boon, you might also want to pick up something like Blinding Flash from Athena or Sweet Surrender from Aphrodite.

Cast and Call boons can also provide a lot of value. Lightning Phalanx helps with room clear, and Zeus Call is great for everything. Arthur's special is usually too slow for a lot of situations, but you can throw a boon on there to help open duos as needed.

And since the build is focusing a lot on attack damage, Chaos is very valuable. Both Attack and Dash Strike boons are the best way to scale your damage further. It's important to note that the more additive damage you have, the more viable Artemis attack becomes, since crits will multiply all of the damage by 3.

Hermes

Your best options are:

- Hyper Delivery (hyper sprint + rush delivery)
- Swift Strike
- Greatest Reflex

Hyper Delivery is a powerful boon combo and that holds true on Arthur as well. Greatest Reflex doesn't greatly enhance the build, but having more dashes with Tidal Dash is always a good thing. The real interesting option here is Swift Strike. If you can find a Rare or Epic Swift Strike, the normally slow attack animations of Arthur become much more viable.

Keepsakes

After starting with Poseidon, you usually want to take either Aphrodite for the attack, or another god keepsake that will complement your build well. Additionally:

- Shackle: if you don't have a good attack boon
- Hades: global damage is always good
- Acorn: the ability to tank hits is very nice in bosses
- Hourglass: if your build is coming along nicely and there is attack damage in the midbiome well, hourglass can be a decent option

Wrap Up

Start with Tidal Dash, and try to pick up a nice big % attack boon. Look for Chaos, duo boons, and other boons that can capitalize off of your attack.

CLOSING

That wraps up the sword guide, if anyone has questions or feedback, you're always welcome to ping me in the Hades Speedrunning discord. I hope this helps you get started on sword and I look forward to seeing your posts in #personal-bests!