# The Good, The Bad, & The Unrelenting

Guardian Choice In Lost Messiah Burn/Tempo/Midrange



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### The Good, The Bad, The Unrelenting.

Since my first experimentation with Castiel back in the Summer of 2023, the deck largely hasn't had too many changes. The core of the deck focuses around Castiel's Special Ability, Oblation, which removes the holy counters from your side of the board to deal that much damage to an opponent. Lost Messiah Tempo focuses on this strong win-condition, pairing its burst potential with a plethora of strong board control tools available to the Divinity realm.

Prior to GCD, the deck was locked into this game plan and focused almost entirely on Sigrid, Avenger Of The Lost Messiah as your guardian.<sup>1</sup> With recent card releases, the deck's general build has stayed relatively the same, but the central core of the deck has been shifted by the release of two crucial cards: Ariyus, The Soulbound Warlock, and Wooley.

These two new pieces have pulled the deck in two directions, with Wooley providing a more consistent way to build up counters for an Oblation kill, and Ariyus as an effect-damage tech piece creating the onus for builds of Castiel less reliant on Oblation. With the impact of these two cards, I would argue that there are now three distinct builds of Castiel. The first is the original build, utilizing Sigrid. The second is Alexandria, now brought to a significantly more prominent level by the addition of Wooley allowing it to easily crunch out Oblation kills more efficiently than Sigrid. The third, builds around the new Creed Guardian Azrael, whose Devotion and AP make the expensive costs of powerful cards more affordable, and whose late game attrition helps to push battle damage to lessen the blowout impact of Ariyus.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Thomas Neilson, "A Biblically Accurate Guide To Castiel #2," LRAW Snapshot, March 31st, 2024. https://www.lrawsnapshot.com/decklists/angel-decks/thomas-neilson-310324

#### The Good

### Alexandria, Protector Of The Pure - Lost Messiah Burn

Let's start with Alex. Even when I was maindecking Sigrid pre-GCD, Alexandria was one of my preferred sideboard options, due to its ability to easily find Helios & Luna against aggressive decks like Sharn Boars Aggro. With Wooley however, The Protector Of The Pure has found her way into the spotlight, here's how.

Wooley is one of the "Familiars" released in GCD, and in my opinion the strongest one. The familiars give your Guardian's ability an Addendum, making it a little bit stronger. In the case of Wooley, Bestowing five Holy Counters onto all of your Warriors. While Wooley can be used with any Angel Guardian, Alex is the only one who's ability can be triggered after your Warlord kills a Warrior by battle, meaning you can use her ability *before* you use Oblation. Additionally, Alex's ability works in our favor here, already granting the board two Holy Counters each.

With these abilities combined, you're adding seven Holy Counters per Warrior, or 35 Holy Counters to a full board. If you've got Hall Of The Heavens to double these holy counters, you're looking at 70 Holy counters at the press of a button. (Or technically two buttons).

When GCD first released, I was very curious and initially impressed by this build. Whilst you lose access to Empyrean Empire at the start of the game, you do guarantee a Wisdom Warrior to start digging through your deck, which leads to a similar level of consistency. The combination of Wooley and Alexandria also makes your lethal Oblation significantly easier to set up and guarantee. Rather than needing to manipulate Halo Of The Lost Messiah as your main piece of counter generation, you instead reduce the requirement to only one card, which can be

tutored by Hall Of The Heavens, or activated earlier in the game at points with less risk of interaction. The weakness of Alexandria is found in its strength, with the reliance on Oblation. By leaning almost entirely into the effect damage kill, you become much weaker to effect damage prevention like Alburdunn's Mayoral Announcement, and more significantly now, Ariyus, The Soulbound Warlock.

#### The Bad

Sigrid, Avenger Of the Lost Messiah - Lost Messiah Tempo

Prior to GCD, Sigrid was effectively the only choice for Castiel.<sup>2</sup> Alexandria simply didn't provide enough power on your Veil Pierce to warrant her as a main deck option. While the other two Angel Guardians have now picked up more power, I still consider Sigrid to be the best general option, although the gap between the different Guardian options has diminished drastically. While Alex offers the most streamlined burn kill, and Azrael offers much more late game attrition, Sigrid offers a lot of power in both categories, if slightly less effective in one single direction compared to the other two options.

Sigrid has received a slight bonus in GCD too with the release of Lost Messiah Punishing Light. Punishing Light is another "Swordstorm" variant, letting you eradicate a
Warrior, Unified, and Fortified off the field. This is obviously great as removal, but I've also
found a niche strength in using Punishing Light as an activator for your eradication effects from
cards like Lost Messiah Corrupt-Sword, Freelia, and Castiel's Alchemic Bloodbond.

The eradication ability is the one that I've used more often, being able to easily place seven Holy counters on your Empyrean Empire Of The Lost Messiah. With Empyrean Empires own activated and static abilities this offers considerable convenience in being able to Eradicate Lost Messiah - Punishing Light from the once per turn ability to gain:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Neilson, "Guide To Castiel #2."

- Seven Holy Counters from Punishing Light
- Two Holy Counters from Empyrean Empire's Once Per Turn Ability
- One Holy Counter from Empyrean Empire's Static Ability

This gives you an incredibly quick and easy way to stack up counters to pay the counter cost of cards like Kabshiel's Favors For The Seraphim and Bow Of The Archangel. While this one card may not seem that significant, the ability to pick up 15 Holy Counters on turn one almost every single game, just off of your Guardian, makes for an incredibly consistent start to enable some of your most powerful control tools.

The main thing with Sigrid is that not much has changed. The Guardian remains as strong as ever, with a few new tools to let it keep up with a shifting metagame. What can be seen here isn't necessarily Sigrid getting *worse*, but rather the other two Guardians catching up with their own unique strengths for the archetype.

### The Unrelenting

At GCD's release, I was incredibly excited for new additions for Castiel in Eshreal,
Punishing Light, and Radiant Orb Of Divine Light. I was also ecstatic for what Wooley and
Citrine Amulet meant in terms of drastically changing how the deck can operate with only a tiny
card change.

#### Azrael was meh.

I was curious about him with Michael at least. The Sanctify synergy was fun, the healing capability was awesome for staying alive against chip damage and burn, and the Special Ability is solid for rebuilding a boardstate and grabbing back key Warriors.

Overall though, the Guardian seemed anemic to Castiel's strategy for a few reasons.

### 1: Starting Your Engines

Start of game abilities are crucial, giving you access to specific pieces right off the bat. For Sigrid, this is eradicating a Lost Messiah card, effectively finding Empyrean Empire Of The Lost Messiah immediately as a counter generation engine and toolbox piece. For Alex, this is any Warrior with 2 or less attack. Usually this is a Wisdom Warrior for early card selection, but can also be a Warrior like Helios & Luna in the right situation.

In comparison, Azrael doesn't do a ton in providing tempo. If you're going second, you get the ability to limit the usage of Unified cards from hand, which doesn't stop your opponent from setting their Unified cards face down to activate them from the board. Effectively, this ability only restricts the reveal effects of Alehouse, and limits what your opponent can do in terms of reacting to a sequence.

Now this on its own isn't too brutal given that the real strength here comes from his Unrelenting Devotion. Azrael's Devotion has three steps, all of which are quite notable. The first reduces your Bloodbourne costs by two. Whilst Castiel isn't quite that aggressive with spending Bloodbourne, it is a nice ability that saves a very relevant amount of DCM over the course of your early turn. An Acceleration Of The Chaos Divine here, a Help From The Chaos Divine here, and the reduction can add up to a degree.

The second stage grants your Sanctify abilities another trigger. This is the main *build* around aspect of Azrael, and why I was much more interested in the Guardian for Michael than for Castiel. Whilst you do run strong Sanctify Warriors of course, Michael has a touch more support for the mechanic with the Seraphim Archetype.

The final ability offers an easy 25 DCM heal, which coupled with the DCM saving from before is a very nice piece of attrition. The issue here is that the Devotion and Azrael do very little to give you a leg up on your opponent in fighting for a Tempo gameplan. There isn't much of anything here to let you pull ahead, quickly build up resources, and have the tools to keep your opponent down.

#### 2: Losing Your Tempo

The incentive for going second with the start of game ability is entirely counterintuitive for a tempo deck looking to control the game for two turns, and win the game *exactly* on turn three. By going second intentionally, you're guaranteeing your opponent the initiative to reach their Veil Pierce turn first. Regardless of winning the game, Veil-Pierce is a crucial turn for the amount of momentum it affords. The combination of Veil, Warlord, Synergy, and Guardian abilities all give players the chance to come back from a spot of disadvantage, which is exactly the spot you're hoping to lock your opponent into when playing a Tempo deck.

The idea of taking control of the game and stopping your opponent from catching up doesn't mesh particularly well with giving your opponent permission to take the first shot, so to speak.

### 3: The Special ability is useless.

Okay obviously not *useless*, but not particularly useful due to timing. Sigrid gives you an ability *after* you use Oblation, which buffs up a Warrior. This is great for essentially doubling your damage, and being able to maneuver around effect damage prevention. Alex gives you an ability *before* you use Oblation, throwing more Holy Counter fuel onto your righteous fire, again affording you more damage. Azrael's ability is a full board revive, from both eradication and discard, making it an appealing and flexible way to build a board of Warriors to stack Holy

Counters on, right? Well, like the rest of the Creed Guardians, Azrael's ability is tied to your Special Ability, and can only be used *after* you've already used Oblation.

So Alex sets you up *before* you oblation, and Sigrid pushes more damage *after* you Oblation, whereas Azrael falls in a weird spot in giving you a board building tool *after* Oblation. Effectively, not that useful for Castiel at a first glance.

Overall, Azrael really wasn't on my radar for a strong Guardian option for Castiel, but I was still interested in trying him out to see what he offers. *And I'm very happy that I did*. My overall verdict remains the same as my first one in that Azrael isn't particularly helpful for the Lost Messiah Tempo. What I did find however, is that Azrael is incredibly potent as an option for a much more midrange build of the deck, which rounds out our third style of Castiel.

Azrael, The Golden Requiem - Lost Messiah Midrange

I'll touch on my terminology here. If you've noticed, I've attributed three different archetypes to the 3 Guardians here. Alexandria is labeled as "Lost Messiah Burn", Sigrid is labeled as "Lost Messiah Tempo", and Azrael is labeled as "Lost Messiah Midrange". Whilst the actual mechanical difference between these decks isn't too distinct, I believe it's worth carving a distinction between their playstyles, to highlight how the builds differ.

Alexandria "Burn" focuses heavily on building into the turn three burn kill, and closing out the game then and there. Azrael "Midrange" carries more attrition capabilities, with the ability to play a longer game and win through consistent chip board beatdown. As the main Guardian, Sigrid is more "Tempo" oriented. She still wields a very similar lethal capability as Alex, whilst putting a touch more power into a potential longer term gameplan. So what does Azrael offer for the deck?

The name of the game here is Attrition. As mentioned, the Unrelenting Devotion doesn't help much in terms of winning, but it's an incredibly impressive tool for the resources it provides. The Bloodbourne cost reduction saves you a nice little bit of DCM off of Acceleration Into The Chaos Divine, Help From The Chaos Divine, Castiel's Alchemic Bloodbond, and any other miscellaneous Bloodbourne costs you pay over the course of the game. The third ability then compounds this with a massive 25 DCM heal. Combine with this Azrael's starting AP of 80 rather than 50, offering a cool extra 30 to work with, relevant as Castiel can easily burn through 50 AP through a three turn game. What this means, is that Azrael gives you a lot more room to work with throughout a game, and gives you access to one card in particular: Empyrean Purification Wave.

Purification Wave is one card that I was very happy to finally be able to include in my decklists. On activation, Wave clears all non-angel face up cards off the field, and shuts down perish abilities for the turn. On resolution, both players get to draw a card for each card sent by the effect.

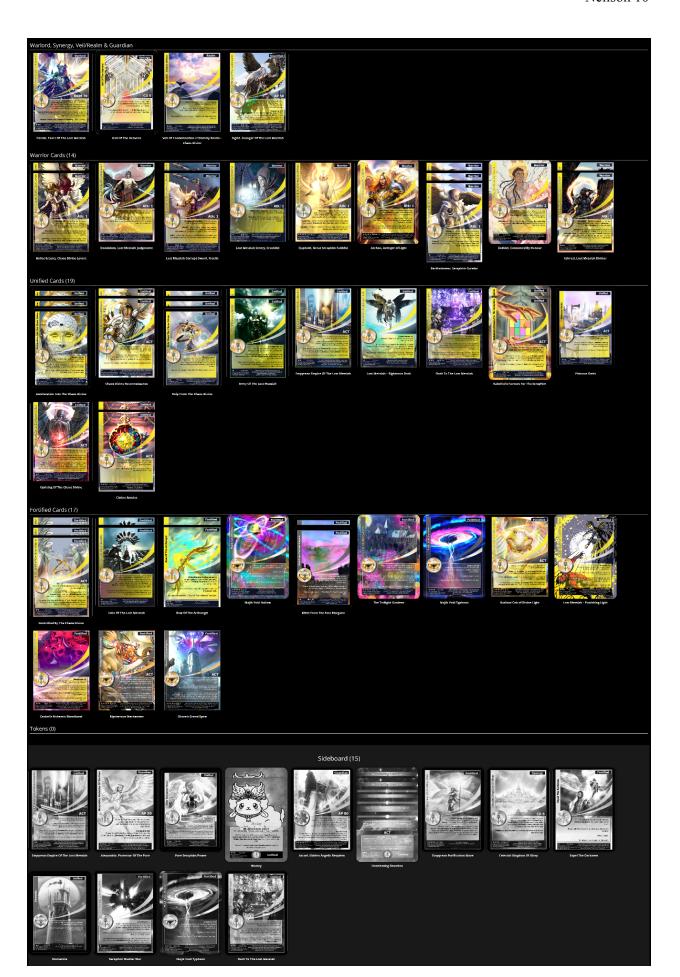
Whilst incredibly powerful, especially when going into your turn three Veil Pierce, Wave has been too costly to include however. The 25 DCM cost is rough, but the real pain has been the 25 AP cost. With Alexandria or Sigrid, Empyrean Purification Wave effectively cuts your AP in half, restricting the consume you have access to for Empyrean Empire Of The Lost Messiah, Bow Of The Archangel, Your Guardian ability, Swift abilities, and either Pure Seraphim Power or Lost Messiah - Punishing Light. Between the 80 AP and the 25 DCM recovery on your Devotion, Azrael effectively pays for Empyrean Purification Wave all by himself, which is his strongest benefit in my opinion. Against grindy board based decks like Mal'ady Garden Stax or

Alero Fandorian Midrange, this can be great as an equalizing force, or as the piece needed to make your lethal push on the following turn.

With this build too, Oblation becomes a much less crucial kill tool. It's still a nice bit of damage, and a way to quickly end some games, but you're looking more into Citrine Amulet and Radiant Orb Of Divine Light to finish off your opponent, and you're much more interested in slower games won by incremental damage off of Warriors like Archon, Avenger Of Light.

### Tag Team

With three solid Guardian options, what's the best way to go? While any of the three can be played in the main deck, I'm of the belief that Sigrid, Avenger Of The Lost Messiah remains the strongest main deck option at the moment, simply due to her versatility. She can still build a lethal kill nearly as consistently as Alex, while being less vulnerable to the increasing (and increasingly flexible) number of Effect Damage prevention effects in the game. With that my current list looks like this:



The full decklist is discussed in more detail in the full LRAW Snapshot Article,<sup>3</sup> but here I just want to cover Guardian selection, and my personal mindset behind it.

The main thing to note is that most of the deck doesn't change with your Guardian swaps, but the changes that occur do drastically change what the deck can do. The listed sideboard offers the ability to swap into either Alexandria or Azrael, but I'm not of the belief that you need, or even want, to have two different guardian swap options. The benefit of having one is in my opinion well worth the sideboard slots, but I believe that the third guardian has diminishing returns in cutting into your more specific sideboard cards for key matchups.

But what are these packages, and how do you swap between them?

	Alexandria, Protector Of The Pure	Azrael, Golden Angelic Requiem
Cards Out	<ul><li>1 Oath To The Lost Messiah</li><li>1 Lost Messiah - Punishing Light</li><li>1 Army Of The Lost Messiah</li><li>1 Citrine Amulet</li></ul>	<ul><li>1 Oath To The Lost Messiah</li><li>1 Lost Messiah - Punishing Light</li><li>1 Army Of The Lost Messiah</li><li>1 Halo Of The Lost Messiah</li></ul>
Cards In	<ul><li>1 Empyrean Empire Of The Lost</li><li>Messiah</li><li>2 Wooley</li><li>1 Pure Seraphim Power</li></ul>	<ul><li>1 Empyrean Empire Of The Lost</li><li>Messiah</li><li>2 Unrelenting Devotion</li><li>1 Empyrean Purification Wave</li></ul>

So the changes themselves aren't too distinct, with a few shared elements between them. For one, swapping Oath To The Lost Messiah for Empyrean Empire Of The Lost Messiah. With Sigrid, running one copy of Oath and one copy of Empire allows you to easily set up your Empyrean Empire right off the back. With losing Sigrid, I'm of the opinion that Oath To The Lost Messiah isn't worth inclusion in the deck compared to the second copy of Empire. The

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Thomas Neilson, "A Biblically Accurate Guide To Castiel #3," LRAW Snapshot, January 7th, 2025. https://www.lrawsnapshot.com/decklists/angel-decks/thomas-neilson-070125

issue here is that you don't have a consistent way to find and eradicate your Lost Messiah cards in deck, apart from Sigrid and Empire itself. As such you only have effectively two ways to activate your Oath. The first, is by eradicating it with Acceleration From The Chaos Divine. The issue here is that this assumes having the Oath already in hand, or drawing it off of Acceleration. Whilst Oath does get you an extra five counters, you'd get almost the exact same result by replacing it directly with a copy of Empire. The second, is through your few cards which do eradicate cards from the deck, namely Help From The Chaos Divine, and Castiel's Alchemic Bloodbond. With only four copies of these cards in your deck, you're never eradicating a critical enough mass to consistently trigger Oath, and you're just as likely to lose your Empire off of these random eradication effects.

As such, swapping Oath for Empire helps you to find Empyrean Empire more consistently when you aren't running Sigrid as your Guardian. The other changes are small piece tuning. The first is swapping out your Guardian exclusive cards: Lost Messiah - Punishing Light for Sigrid, Pure Seraphim Power for Alex, and Unrelenting Devotion for Azrael. This one is pretty self explanatory, but does show off what each Guardian does differently, and each one is an appealing option alongside its relevant Guardian. Punishing light is a big piece of counter generation as mentioned, giving your Sigrid starts a huge degree of consistency. Pure Seraphim Power is a nice way to make good use of Qaphsiel and Bartholomew as your Seraphim Wisdom Warriors. With Alex guaranteeing you a Seraphim Warrior off the start of the game, Pure Seraphim Power is a useful tool for avoiding Warrior flood and using your Warriors to generate card advantage. For Azrael, we've already talked about Unrelenting Devotion quite a bit and it's the main draw to the Guardian. The final few cards then highlight the game plan changes. With

Wooley as the counter engine for Alex, and Empyrean Purification Wave as the catchup & blowout tool that rewards you for stocking up on DCM and AP.

In terms of cuts, there are three different cards that I lean towards: Army Of The Lost Messiah and Citrine Amulet with Alex, and Army Of The Lost Messiah and Halo Of The Lost Messiah for Azrael. In both cases Army Of The Lost Messiah gets trimmed down one copy, largely due to having the consistency turned down on your Empyrean Empire. While Army is strong for both its eradication ability and its mass board revive, having less consistency in triggering its eradication effect makes it much less desirable. While the revive is relevant, that's only the case later in the game, and both Alex and Azrael have other routes to more frequently recur and revive Warriors. Alex by making more effective use of Qaphsiel's Perish ability with Pure Seraphim Power, and Azrael through his Consume ability.

The final trim diverges for me, with Citrine Amulet going to one for Alex, and Halo Of
The Lost Messiah going to one for Azrael. Both cards fill a comparable role for the deck as a tool
for helping the deck to find lethal, with both representing theoretically 15 damage with a full
board. Additionally, both cards fall into a similar weakness being less effective in the early game,
not offering a source of card advantage or interaction. In the midgame, both do offer relevant
forms of protection. For example, Amulet helps Warriors to survive against board minus effects
out of Mal'ady, and Halo lets you protect your board against destruction effects, such as against
Mythical Beasts. The value of this protection however doesn't offer enough strength to keep over
other sideboard cards being brought in.

With Alex, Citrine Amulet gets cut, whilst for Azrael, it's Halo. With Alex, you're already looking to leverage the effect damage kill, and Halo still does act as a way to build up counters, and to protect your board in the midgame. Additionally, the damage from Halo can be

easily ramped up with the help of Hall Of The Heavens, which you're already hoping to lean into with Alexandria. For Azrael, Citrine Amulet becomes your main win condition alongside Radiant Orb Of Divine Light, as the board damage buff over several turns becomes more likely to build up, and trample over boardstates of smaller Warriors, not dissimilarly to Fandorian Midrange, with Fandorian Outpost. In comparison, while Halo is nice for protecting your Warriors, it's less necessary to build up to a huge Oblation finish, and can often be an effectively "dead" card in hand. With Azrael offering you no inherent way to generate card advantage or card selection at the start, you're interested in limiting the number of dead cards in hand.

#### Matchups

So with three different builds, and three different playstyles, where do these different Guardians shine? As matchups and decks change in playstyle, and in points of interaction, and new decks pop into being, I don't think it's particularly useful to provide just a chart or list of what Guardians go where. I will offer some of the main decks each Guardian is good against, but the goal isn't to offer a strict line for what Guardian gets used where, but to help illustrate each one's strength. Rather, I want to talk more about the situations in which these three Guardians excel.

#### Alexandria, Protector Of The Pure

As mentioned, Alex is your build-up effect damage kill. With Wooley in tow, Alex can easily pump out plenty of damage with plenty of consistency. As such, I'm a fan of Alex in spots where you can go for a quick kill, especially when going first. Against slower decks packed with interaction, Alex can help to push through their early defenses to set up that incredibly consistent kill with Wooley. Against a deck like Gaia for example, it can range anywhere from annoying to impossible to get in battle damage off of your Warriors plagued by Blockade. In this spot, your

effect damage lethal is much more consistent, especially against 65 DCM Warlords like Gaia, Mortis, or Sharn. Wooley + Alex gives your board an immediate 35 Counters, and Hall Of The Heavens doubles this up to 70 for a clean 66 damage burst onto the weaker of the Warlords. Sharn represents the other spot where Alex comes in handy, in spots where Helios & Luna, Chaos Divine Lovers, is a key control piece. Against these faster battle focused decks, there's a lot of benefit to be gained from a Warlord with a good starting card advantage and guaranteed access to this lock down piece. In this way, Helios & Luna becomes your main "counter sink" with its Sanctify ability.

### Azrael, Golden Angelic Requiem

In contrast, Azrael is big for me against more decks in the middle of the pack. Against Midrange decks, you aren't quite as pressed for immediate action on the board, but you also aren't needing to find your one opening against a control list. Rather, Azrael lets you play off of your attrition of DCM and AP, holding off consistent chip damage and having the card recovery to rebuild in grindy positions. I'm also a fan of Azrael when going second against Control. While when going first it makes sense to push the advantage as far as you can to find lethal before your opponent can pierce the veil, when going second you're more needing to prepare for your opponent's veil pierce. Ideally, this means having the resources to let your opponent's push crash against your board, before using veil pierce to start the turn around to take back over the game.

### Sigrid, Avenger Of The Lost Messiah

So, where does Sigrid work well? To a degree, everywhere. Splitting the difference between Alex and Azrael means that Sigrid is generally flexible enough to swing both ways and play a more tempo based game, or a more attrition based game. But in what spots does Sigrid excel? In part I like Sigrid against opposing Tempo decks, and some decks with heavy Fortified

interaction. Having the ability to still represent the turn three kill but with more protective pieces is appealing, and having the ability to consistently generate 15 Holy counters off of your Guardian easily enables some of your best anti-interaction tools in Kabshiels Favors To The Seraphim and Bow Of The Archangel. As mentioned, I'm a fan of Sigrid against control decks which aren't particularly board dependent. While a deck like Mal'ady Garden Stax builds off of strong consistent hate pieces, against Control decks less worried about board presence the quick power of Sigrid is more valuable than the board wiping capability of Azrael with Empyrean Purification Wave. The main power in Sigrid is in having less polarizing matchups, and very few truly bad matchups to worry about.

#### Conclusion

Overall, the current state of Castiel is incredibly interesting, with a lot of choice in a small package of options. All three Guardians have appealing and unique strengths that make the deck incredibly flexible in deckbuilding and tournaments. Tempo decks are already flexible at the base with the ability to shift from more controlling gameplans to more aggressive ones at the flip of a switch, and the ability to extenuate that change by sideboarding makes it an incredibly fluid deck and shifting its speed and focus. If you're interested in playing Castiel and haven't read it already, the article released alongside this writeup explores the rest of the deck and how to learn and compete with it.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Neilson, "Guide To Castiel #3."

## **Bibliography**

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