

A large, dark, craggy rock formation rises from the ocean, its surface textured with deep grooves and sharp peaks. The water in the foreground is a deep blue, with white-capped waves crashing against the base of the rock. A flock of white seabirds, possibly gulls or terns, is scattered across the sky, some flying close to the rock and others further away. The background is a clear, light blue sky.

# MONO UTRON

THE BEST DECK IN MODERN



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*You guys are awesome.*

## CONTENTS

<b><u>INTRODUCTION</u></b>	<b>6</b>
<b>WHAT IS UTRON?</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>A WORSE Gx TRON?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>WHY PLAY UTRON?</b>	<b>8</b>
A TOOLBOX	8
A PERSONAL STATEMENT	8
FLEXIBLE AND ADAPTABLE	9
CHECKLIST	9
<b><u>DECK OBJECTIVE</u></b>	<b>10</b>
<b>NOT A TRON DECK</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>HOW THE DECK WINS</b>	<b>10</b>
<b><u>DECK CONSTRUCTION</u></b>	<b>12</b>
<b>MANABASE</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>CONTROL MAGIC</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>CARD ADVANTAGE AND UTILITY</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>THREATS AND STABILISERS</b>	<b>19</b>
<b><u>SIDEBOARDING</u></b>	<b>24</b>
<b>AGGRO WEAKNESSES</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>GRAVEYARD HATE</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>LAND HATE</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>COMBO MORE LIKE NONBO</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>CONTROL PILES</b>	<b>27</b>
<b><u>REJECTED CARDS</u></b>	<b>28</b>
<b>THREATS</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>CONTROL CARDS</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>LANDS</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>UTILITY CARDS</b>	<b>31</b>

<b>HOW TO PLAY THE DECK</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>YOUR OPPONENT'S DECK</b>	<b>32</b>
AGGRO, CONTROL, MIDRANGE OR COMBO	32
PROACTIVE VS REACTIVE	33
ESSENTIAL VS REDUNDANT	34
IDENTIFYING DECKS	35
<b>UTRON'S ARSENAL</b>	<b>35</b>
COUNTERSPELLS, BOUNCE AND REMOVAL	36
STABILISERS, THREATS AND WINCONS	38
CARD ADVANTAGE AND VALUE	44
<b>KEY THREATS</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>PROBLEMATIC CARDS</b>	<b>48</b>
TEFERI, TIME RAVELER	48
VEIL OF SUMMER	49
CAVERN OF SOULS	49
AETHER VIAL	50
THALIA, GUARDIAN OF THRABEN	50
THOUGHTSEIZE	51
JACE, THE MIND SCULPTOR	51
<b>CARDS YOU CAN IGNORE</b>	<b>52</b>
BLOOD MOON	52
ALPINE MOON	53
STONY SILENCE	53
DAMPING SPHERE	53
FIELD OF RUIN	53
<b>EXAMPLE HANDS</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>GODHANDS</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>KEEPABLE HANDS</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>BORDERLINE HANDS</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>MULLIGANS</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>CLOSING NOTES</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1: MATCHUPS AND SIDEBOARDING</b>	<b>60</b>

<b>AGGRO DECKS</b>	<b>61</b>
BURN	61
INFECT	62
HUMANS	63
MERFOLK	65
PROWESS	66
BOGLES	67
MILL	68
DREDGE	69
<b>MIDRANGE DECKS</b>	<b>70</b>
JUND PILES	71
ABZAN PILES	72
ELDRAZI TRON	74
DEATH'S SHADOW	75
SOULHERDER	76
PONZA	78
DEATH AND TAXES	79
<b>CONTROL DECKS</b>	<b>81</b>
UGx CONTROL	81
8-RACK	83
BLUE MOON	84
MONO RED PRISON	85
MONO U TRON	86
<b>COMBO DECKS</b>	<b>87</b>
AD NAUSEAM	87
NEOBAND	89
STORM	90
GxTRON	92
AMULET TITAN	93
GOBLINS	95
WHIRZA VARIANTS	96
LIVING END	97
<b>APPENDIX 2: FURTHER READING</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>OTHER MATERIAL</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>AUTHOR'S TOURNAMENT REPORTS</b>	<b>99</b>

## INTRODUCTION



Mono UTron is the misunderstood shy sibling of the Tron family of decks; going unnoticed at the dinner table while its bigger brothers scream and throw Karns at each other. It is a deck that is often thought of as being inherently less powerful, less linear, and less unfair than Gx or Eldrazi Tron, unless you put it in the hands of someone who's spent a great deal of time with their version of the deck. I like to think I fall into that category, and so want to try and put down what I've learnt in the six years I've been playing Islands and hating Cavern.

This primer is long. So far, with the exception of the excellent FAQ put down by pierakor, Trellon's WIP primer and the original MTGSalvation thread with input from the deck's creator, Shoktroopa, there exists very little searchable content on this wonderful deck. I created this document to try and put together a centralised source of information for both new and current pilots, with the aim of sparking in people the same affection for the deck that makes me miss it when I try and play with anything else. Since all the currently available material focuses on typical primer content (mainboard/sideboard inclusions, matchup ratings etc), this primer will try and describe more about strategy when playing the deck, and how the different cards complement each other. Hopefully this goes somewhere to putting UTron more firmly on the map of the Modern metagame. Failing that, I hope you enjoy reading.

### WHAT IS UTRON?

UTron is a slow, draw-go blue control deck that seeks to delay and disrupt the opponent's strategy and then use stabilising threats to take over the game. UTron is unique in that it generates more card and mana advantage together than any other control deck in Modern. Anything that is trying to grind out value or play the long game is

going to have an extremely hard time; playing threats into a stonewall of counters and slowly running out of gas while we drown in card advantage and play giant stabilisers backed up by even more permission and a ton of mana.

Our mana advantage comes in the inclusion of Tron; the affectionate name for the combination of the three ‘Urza’ lands: Tower, Power Plant and Mine. When assembled, these lands give you a total of 7 colourless mana, and it hardly needs explaining how generating 7 mana from three lands can put you in a very powerful position. More conventional Tron decks use these lands aggressively, to play threats early and hope they’re good enough to win. UTron uses the Urza lands to complement our control game with a massive mana advantage, allowing us to play powerful colourless cards whilst always keeping our interaction live.

### A WORSE GX TRON?

UTron is often thought of as a ‘worse’ or ‘budget’ version of its more infamous brother GxTron. In reality, it is a completely different deck.

The green variants of Tron are linear decks. They want to get Tron online as soon as possible, usually by turn 3, and play whichever threats they’ve drawn as fast as they can. They sometimes have interaction splashes in the form of Fatal Push, Kozilek’s Return or Path to Exile, but these are there as a means of protecting the deck until it can enact the primary game plan; to throw big colourless cards at the opponent. This game plan cannot be well adapted to the deck you’re facing; getting turn three Tron is only good if the threats you have in your hand line up well against the opponent’s deck. These threats are drawn largely at random, and also cannot be protected once they’re on the board. The linearity of GxTron also means it performs a lot worse if the Tron element is removed, forcing it to tap a fair number of lands for its threats. The deck doesn’t have enough interaction to stop any form of decent clock from killing it before turn 7.

UTron is the least linear deck in Modern; everything our deck does revolves around our opponent’s strategy. Instead of hurriedly assembling Tron and throwing whatever we have in our hand against the opponent, we’re in the business of slowly delaying and dismantling their game plan, buying time until a *specific* stabiliser for their strategy can be brought onto the table and protected. Our stabilisers are versatile in the type of attack they can stop, allowing us to tailor our lines of play to exactly what the opponent is doing, only looking to complete Tron and play large colourless cards when we’re sure we have the correct ones for that matchup. We can also do this without Tron, since we are perfectly capable of protecting ourselves until we can get to turn 6+ and tap a fair number of lands for whichever stabiliser we’ve found.

UTron is a completely different deck from conventional Tron. It trades linearity and aggression for insane resilience, flexibility and inevitability. You still get to cast big colourless fun cards, but you get to choose the most effective ones to cripple your opponent, and can make sure they stick.

## WHY PLAY UTRON?

UTron is quite possibly the most interactive deck in Modern. We have a huge amount of permission spells, counters and bounce spells that all aim to delay the opponent whilst digging and gaining card advantage. While you slowly disrupt and dismantle your opponent's strategy, they're also forced to watch you build up your inevitable huge mana advantage until you either win on the spot or generate a board state that completely invalidates any remaining threats. Successfully piloting the deck feels like playing the game with a loaded cannon pointed at your opponent, watching as they get increasingly desperate to resolve any sort of pressure before your endgame comes online and you completely take over. Most games end with the opponent out of gas, facing a hand of permission spells and a stabiliser they can't fight through anyway.

UTron is the best deck in Modern, the rest of the world just doesn't know it yet.

## A TOOLBOX

Playing UTron is different to playing with most Modern decks, in that you feel like you have your entire deck at your disposal every game. The sheer amount of card draw and digging, combined with the number of tutors and recursion effects creates a playstyle in which you'll see a lot of your deck, allowing you to play a variety of different stabilising control cards knowing that in the right matchup you'll only need one of them to completely answer the game. This style of deck means you'll always have outs to your opponent's strategy, and after the first few turns of each game you'll be able to work out which cards in your deck are effective and which are not. The dig spells then allow you to play a toolbox style deck; carefully choosing the required stabilisation spells for each matchup whilst you control the game, eventually creating a situation in which the opponent has no hope of winning.

## A PERSONAL STATEMENT

UTron, more than other control decks, has a huge scope for personal deckbuilding choice. Whilst a good number of the cards are staples (Thirst, Condescend, Ruins to name a few), there are a large number of flex slots, and a wide range of cards that are completely playable. Our plentiful supply of colourless mana opens the doors to a lot of weird cards that would normally only see the table during EDH games. Due to the huge level of digging and tutoring the deck does naturally, these cards only need be included as singletons, meaning you can test and play whichever few curveball inclusions you have a soft spot for without them detracting from the primary game plan. This allows you to customise your deck for both the local meta and your personal style of control. You may prefer a more prison-style strategy and include more Chalices and cards like Ensnaring Bridge and Silent Arbiter, or prefer an tempo approach and play more Talismans to ramp into Thought-Knot Seer, Karn and Batterskull. This customisation aspect is important for the deck's competitiveness, but mostly allows you to create a deck that you thoroughly enjoy playing whilst still being effective.

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## FLEXIBLE AND ADAPTABLE

A lot of Modern decks lose games as a result of their opponent playing cards that they just can't deal with. Be it cards like Rest in Peace against Dredge or Blood Moon against Shadow, a lot of matches can come down to 'they played a card that invalidates my strategy, so I just can't do anything meaningful now because I can't remove it'. This sideboard lottery idea is a well-known curse in Modern that doesn't really plague UTron. Our extremely high level of interaction means that we're virtually never in a situation in which our opponent has dumped a card that just shuts us off forever. We have bounce spells, boardwipe spells and other types of removal that allow us to sit across from the opponent's prison cards, happily playing the longer game until the perfect moment to remove their hate and drop the hammer. Even in games that UTron loses, it's never the sour loss of having nothing to do and watching your opponent just take free turns. You always feel like you have a decent number of outs when you're on the back foot, and due to the absurd digging power of the deck, you're quite likely to find them. UTron has the ability to adapt to any strategy, any deck, and come out on top.

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## CHECKLIST

UTron is the right deck for you if:

- You like drawing lots of cards,
- You like countering spells,
- You like having enormous amounts of mana to do both of these in the same turn,
- You like playing big, stabilising threats that are likely to immediately force a concession,
- You're fed up of not being able to protect your win conditions,
- You enjoy using your entire deck as a giant digging, tutoring toolbox with lots of one-offs,
- You're happy to put in a lot of hours learning both your deck and every other one you need to stop,
- You enjoy the thought required to completely readapt your game plan multiple times each round,
- You like the feeling of always being able to do something, even if you're still losing,
- You enjoy taking control of all your opponent's turns and watching the light die in their eyes,
- You need salt for your chips.

UTron is the wrong deck for you if:

- You want to throw big colourless threats at your opponent as rapidly as possible and hope they stick,
- You like linear decks,
- You like fast decks,
- You prefer decks that prioritise how best to win, as oppose how best to not lose,
- You want a deck that you can just pick up fresh and take down a tournament with,
- You enjoy having friends.

Overall, the deck is one that rewards you for learning how to play it. A new player with UTron will lose a lot, but an experienced player will seem invincible. This characteristic of the deck is due to its slow inherent power; being able to have a free run with absurd card advantage spells and absurd lands once you've spent the time to master the play lines of your particular brew. It's one of the hardest decks in Modern to become competent with, but once you do, the decks feels like you're playing chess against draughts.

## DECK OBJECTIVE

### NOT A TRON DECK

The main misunderstanding when playing UTron for the first time is in the belief that we are a Tron deck.

Tron decks are best defined as decks whose primary objective is to get the Urza lands out as soon as possible, and perform optimally when they can do this. GxTron aims to do this by turn three, and drop Karn Liberated down so early that he takes over the game. Eldrazi Tron is similar but also uses Eldrazi Temple as a ‘fourth Tron land’; it wants as much colourless mana as it can to play the Eldrazi from Oath of the Gatewatch, then beat the opponent to death with objectively more powerful creatures than they are facing. Both of these decks would ideally like Tron online fast, and in the case of Gx, usually perform a lot worse if their Tron assembly is delayed or destroyed.

UTron is not a Tron deck. Granted, our manabase contains 4 of each Tronland and we have the ability to drop a Turn 3 Wurmcoil Engine if luck waves its hand on our opening 7. Against some aggro decks this can win a quick game. However, getting to Turn 3 Tron is both not a requirement for our deck to work, nor is it something we can easily capitalise on given that our threat choice is fundamentally different from GxTron. Our deck is designed to control the game with blue spells, and our threats are designed to stabilise an advanced board state, not to be dropped aggressively with no protection and hope they’re good enough.

UTron is better thought of as a control deck that has Tron included as a way to be better than other control decks. Any control player knows the value of making sure you hit your land drops to sooner get into the stage of playing slow threats whilst having countermagic up. The inclusion of Tron allows us to suddenly leap ahead on resource and play multiple spells per turn with ease, slowly taking over the game with growing card advantage and always having interaction up.

UTron is a blue deck that splashes Tron, not a Tron deck that splashes blue.

### HOW THE DECK WINS

The generic game plan is similar to other control decks: Work out your opponent’s strategy, stop their key cards, stay alive and gain card advantage until either they’re out of gas or you can just take over and win. To this end, we include a number of counterspells, bounce spells, boardwipes and stabilisation cards, allowing us to prolong the game into a situation where our card advantage matters, and we can use Tron to overwhelm their remaining threats with a combination of bigger threats and more permission, whilst never having to tap out.

A key difference between us and other control decks lies in the idea that their threats are usually relatively slow or incremental and need a cleaner board to win. With this requirement, the control parts of those decks need to completely run the opponent out of gas and maintain an empty board for the threats to push through. Since we have Tron included in the deck, our threats can be much bigger and focus more on stabilising developed boards

single-handedly. With this in mind, our control cards need only to slow down the opponent and deal with cards that the stabilisers cannot stop. This provokes a greater level of consideration when playing, as the objective turns from ‘stop everything’ into ‘does this card prevent me from stabilising or kill me too quickly? Can I just ignore it?’ . This is one of the reasons that UTron is considered one of the harder decks in Modern to just pick up and win games with.

Our early game is spent holding up countermagic to stop the opponent and dig, whilst using the end of their turn to progress our game plan with Expedition Maps and Thirst for Knowledge. This early stage is the toughest part of the game, as we try and remain in control of multiple early threats that may get underneath our permission spells. Often the nature of your opponent’s deck and your hand will force you to pick and choose which cards to stop, and it is here that knowledge of your opponent’s strategy is most required.

As we progress to the midgame our card advantage gained in the early game starts to matter. By this point the opponent is usually trying to play their deck’s win condition, and if the early turns have done well we should be in a position to stop this from happening. This is where most of the games are decided, as we aim to precisely cripple their attempt to force through a win and leave them with little left to do. By this point we are usually at or close to Tron, and can prepare to get to the tipping point where our card and mana advantage are both fully online and the game swings dramatically in our favour.

The endgame is our playground. Here we usually have a stabiliser down, Tron online, supreme card advantage over the opponent and can turn our game plan around to concentrate on winning over not losing. Usually a stabiliser or two is enough to force through a victory, but if the game is dragged out further we will just eventually get to our inevitability with Mindslaver lock. Either way we’re heavily favoured; we have more mana, more resources and our topdecks are all strong, live cards. It’s our turn now, and we have a formidable endgame.

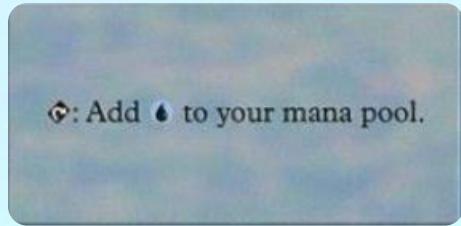
This is only a brief summary of the deck’s high level strategy, and is discussed in far more depth in [How to Play the Deck](#).

## DECK CONSTRUCTION

This section focuses on the core cards of the deck, and tries to explain the reasoning behind what is included. This will always try to draw from the [Deck Objective](#), and focus on explaining why our card choices differ from conventional control decks and conventional Tron decks.

### MANABASE

The manabase for UTron is the most important part of the deck, and often the one which is most abused by new players trying new brews. When starting the deck for the first time, it's tempting to think of all the awesome flashy blue spells you could play, like Cryptic Command or Omnicience, whilst ignoring the fact that the most pivotal card in the deck is, without doubt, Island.



Well, obviously. We're a control deck and we need Islands to play our blue spells. So does UW Control, but their primer doesn't make a big song and dance about pointing out the obvious. We are not UW Control, however, and crucially our manabase is locked into at least 12 lands that cannot ever produce blue mana. 13 if you count Academy Ruins, which we are doing, and even more if you start considering other utility lands like Field of Ruin or Gemstone Caverns, although these can be blue sources in their own way.

The point is, only half of our lands produce blue mana, meaning we are a 'two-colour' deck even with just blue spells. Every opening hand you draw will be primarily defined by whether or not it contains a blue source. If your opener had Mine, Power Plant, Tower, Wurmcoil and three other nonlands, it would be an acceptable keep, but you should be very worried about not having a blue source, and it would immediately become the best thing you could draw each turn until it appears. As said above, our deck's primary strategy is playing blue control spells, not throwing early Tron threats at our opponent. Our limited supply of reliable blue sources is the primary reason we cannot play cards like Cryptic Command. Having UUU rarely happens through the course of an entire game, let alone reliably by turn 4. This concept informs a lot of the card choices later on.

The core of our manabase looks like this:

**12 TRONLANDS** - Shouldn't need much explaining, these give our deck its identity. Some variants play a few less than 4 of each in favour of more blue sources or utility lands, but they are few and far between, and usually have a very good reason for doing so with regards to the rest of the deck.

**ACADEMY RUINS** – This is both a very useful utility land and also half of our inevitability. This, Mindslaver and 11U wins the game. Academy Ruins is probably our best land after Island for the reason that it allows us to recur so many useful things. This is one of our most essential cards, and is discussed further in [Card Advantage and Value](#).

**6+ ISLANDS** – Our most important land. The number of Islands that should be included varies based on a number of factors: how many other blue source lands you’re playing (Oboro, Tolaria, Minamo), how many nonland blue sources you’re playing (Talismans, Signets), and how many times you want to mulligan away hands that would have been great with a blue source in them. It’s up to you to find the right balance of these cards, but as a base starter:

- You want to have about 10-12 cards that directly produce blue mana. Most should be lands.
- At least 6 of these should be Islands.
- Blue sources that are conditional or painful (Taplands, Shocklands) should be limited to 1 or 2.

As with most things in this deck, it’s not an exact science and people will show success with brews that seem wildly wrong to others. However, it cannot be denied by anyone with experience that your blue source count and availability is a fundamental consideration when building your deck.

With the core lands covered, some other good options include:

**FIELD OF RUIN** – This has shown itself as being straight up better than the older inclusions of Ghost Quarter or Tectonic Edge in our deck. It doesn’t put us down a land drop, and it can turn itself into an untapped blue source. The activation cost is also generic mana, which we will usually have ample supply of. Field of Ruin can also let good hands without blue sources be keepable, which GQ and TE can’t do. The other two are both still very playable, but most control decks as a whole have realised the benefits of FoR.

**BLAST ZONE** – A tutorable Engineered Explosives on a land is basically an auto-include in the deck. There is the consideration that this doesn’t make blue mana, however the payoff is absolutely worth it and this card will win you games by itself.

**GEMSTONE CAVERNS** - This card is used to offset the considerable disadvantage this deck sometimes faces on the draw; not being able to counter a scary two-drop and remaining on the back foot for the rest of the game. It comes with a steep cost – card advantage and having it be pretty bad when it doesn’t do its trick, but it is certainly playable and very powerful when it works correctly. Also worth noting it can produce black mana for Dismember, EE and Surgical.

**OBORO, PALACE IN THE CLOUDS** – This is here as a ‘non-Island Island’ that doesn’t get hit by things like Boil or Choke, which people will occasionally bring in against us and can hurt a lot if they resolve. Oboro also has a number of edge cases uses thanks to its second ability, including but not limited to:

- Using itself as double blue; tap Oboro, bounce it using some Tron mana then replay it, giving you UU from one blue land. This can be used for playing something like a Treasure Mage on your turn then having blue to hold up countermagic.
- Bouncing in response to ‘discard a card’ effects to save the last card in your hand.
- Bouncing to save from mass land destruction or Liliana ultimates.
- Bouncing to increase cards in your hand against 8-Rack.
- Putting abilities on the stack to deny your opponent access to sorcery speed plays when they have priority.

**MINAMO, SCHOOL AT WATER’S EDGE** – This is an Oboro with a less useful second ability. Played for the same reason and can untap a Mindslaver or an Eldrazi titan in edge cases.

**TOLARIA WEST** – A solid tutor for Lands, Chalice, EE and Walking Ballista whilst also being a blue source, this card is often questioned as to why it doesn't deserve a spot in the core lands. When you draw in such a way that the ETB tapped stings you, you'll realise why. It's absolutely a very playable card and has the great advantage of turning your late-game Maps into a threat in the form of Ballista, but the awareness needs to be there that the tapped clause will get you from time to time, and it will hurt.

**CASTLE VANTRESS** – A low-cost-to-run utility land that taps for blue and allows us to dig for answers in the late game. Most builds should run a single copy of this card if you have the space without dipping too low on Islands.

**ELDRAZI TEMPLE** – Used if you are running the full playset of Thought-Knot Seer in the main to form a more aggressive playstyle, similar to Eldrazi Tron. This strategy is strong against the UGx decks currently popular in Modern however consideration has to be taken for losing the blue source this would otherwise be.

**DUAL LANDS** – Darkslick Shores, Watery Grave, River of Tears, Underground River. These lands trade life or consistency for the bonus of less painful Dismembers, Surgicals and getting EE on more counters. If you're relying on EE, you can likely run 2 of these in conjunction with some Talismans. These likely aren't worth it just to pay for the phyrexian mana costs of other black cards.

The number of lands in the standard deck is usually dependant on your number of nonland blue sources, usually Talismans or Signets. If you're running those cards, you can go down to 23 lands. If you're not, best to stick with 24/25. You really don't want to miss land drops. These are advantages and disadvantages of both types of manabase, and these can be readily realised when considering tradeoffs like ramp vs artifact removal. When choosing an option, it's also worth considering if you're the sort of player who would prefer to tap out on turn 2 for the ramp from a Talisman (to ramp into Thought-Knot Seer, Karn or Solemn Simulacrum and Wurmcoil Engine), or play the deck more reactively and always be holding up counterspells.

The balance of your manabase after the Tronlands and Ruins should be based on trying to keep the blue source count as high as you can whilst including the utility lands you would like to use. Much as most players would love to mimic UW control and play 4 Field of Ruins, we can't dip that low on Islands. Blue sources will always be the first indicator of a good UTron manabase.

To explain this more fully, it's worth considering our deck's blue source bottleneck, which is something not immediately apparent until you've played the deck a while and start to experience it first-hand. The concept is that, due to our low ratio of blue sources to overall lands and especially given the nature of Tron, often our play lines are limited not by overall mana (as would be the case with other blue control decks) but by the number of blue sources we have out. If we have Tron and Island out, we're still in the rough position of not being able to play a Treasure Mage and hold up countermagic, nor being able to counter a spell then Thirst for Knowledge at the end of our opponent's turn. For this reason, the mana costs of cards we play are evaluated quite differently than other decks. A card that costs 1U is far closer in 'bottleneck mana cost' to a card that costs 2U than it is to one that costs UU. The extra generic mana for the 2U is usually readily available to us, whereas the extra blue source required in the UU spell is often a tough requirement. This concept is very important, and is part of the reason why UTron plays very few UU-costed spells, and never plays anything requiring UUU.

Despite being important, the UTron manabase isn't too tricky to build. 12 Tronlands, Academy Ruins, 10 blue sources, then any utility lands you want to run. Just remember how important those Islands are.

## CONTROL MAGIC

After the manabase, these are the cards that should merit the greatest consideration when deckbuilding. This section of the deck allows us to implement the core part of our strategy – not to die to whatever our opponent is trying to do. With the current wide-open Modern meta, the strategies you'll face will vary considerably in the way they try and blitzkrieg you to death or grind you out. This section of the deck aims to stop all of them as best it can, buying time for your card advantage to matter and stabilising threats to land and do their job. The cards fall into four main categories:

- Counterspells. These are how we stop most things, by ensuring they never hit the board. Nothing new here for control.
- Bounce spells. If things we couldn't or didn't counter have hit the board and need to go away for a bit, we can get them back to our opponent's hand, and maybe even get to counter them later.
- Removal spells. If things really need to go away, we kill them. This includes boardwipes and cards like Thought-Knot Seer.
- Prison cards. Static cards, usually artifacts, that prevent a strategy from winning or seriously hamper it whilst they're on the field. This is mostly our sideboard suite.

Due to the nature of our manabase, and the fact that we inherently need to dig through our deck as much as we can to get to the cards we need for that matchup, a lot of our control spells either cantrip or scry. This is why Remand is usually favoured over Mana Leak, and Repeal over Boomerang. Our cards have the requirement of buying time and digging for specific cards instead of having to completely stop anything the opponent does. This is the reason Cyclonic Rift, which seems like it should be a 4-of in our deck, only takes up one slot in most variants. It's a great card, being able to bounce anything early and often being a complete blowout late game, but it doesn't cantrip or dig. So we can't run too many copies of it or we run out of cards.

Our spells also have to be flexible. Vapor Snag is an example of a tempo card this deck doesn't want. It only hits creatures and it doesn't dig. For the same number of blue sources tapped, we have Repeal, which hits everything, cantrips and the X cost scales with Tron. Condescend is another card that is very good on Turn 2 and on Turn 8, as the permission cost gets big fast with Tronlands. As a third example, you can readily see the flexibility of a card like Supreme Will, functioning as a Mana Leak that is also an Impulse in the late game for the measly cost of one extra colourless mana.

Being in Mono U and colourless, we don't have a great suite of obvious removal to choose from. Blue has a number of polymorph style options like Pongify or Reality Shift, but these cards leave bodies down on the board that we still have to get rid of, and are thus card disadvantage. Some variants of UTron splash white for Path to Exile (along with the Gifts/Rites combo) or black for Fatal Push, but the manabases for these decks are even tighter than ours and have to be done exactly right to work well. As a result, our removal package is usually a combination of colourless spot removal (Dismember, Spatial Contortion, Walking Ballista) and boardwipes like Oblivion Stone, Engineered Explosives and Ugin.

Our prison cards are our way of answering decks that we otherwise have trouble with; usually hyper aggressive decks that get under our countermagic and kill us before our card and resource advantage matter. The most obvious and widely used candidate here is Chalice of the Void. This card is usually played on 1, and generates virtual

card advantage by blanking only 4 of our spells (Maps) vs a good number of spells in the opponent's deck, or just outright winning the game.

Other 'prison cards' include sideboard cards like Silent Arbiter, Ensnaring Bridge, Spellskite, Grafdigger's Cage, and Pithing Needle effects like Sorcerous Spyglass. The majority of these will be in the [Sideboard](#).

The card choices for the control section of the deck are as follows:

**4 CONDESCEND** – Our best counterspell. Scales with Tron and sets up our draws. Always a four of, as it's very often the best spell in your hand at all stages of the game.

**3-4 REMAND** – Another staple of control decks, buys time and digs. Remanding our own spells in grindy matchups or control mirrors is strong to create card advantage.

**0-2 SUPREME WILL** – Your 9<sup>th</sup> counterspell. This is a great card that serves as a hard counter early on and a very good dig spell late into the game.

**1-2 REPEAL** – Our bounce spell that scales with Tron and cantrips.

**0-4 SPATIAL TORTION** – Our normal mainboard removal spell, this kills all small creatures, even those with regenerate or indestructible. Can also be used to gain more life with Wurmcoil Engine, pump a Thought-Knot Seer for lethal, and doesn't cost us blue mana. Be careful of Blood Moon.

**0-3 DISMEMBER** – Dismember is our more suicidal mainboard removal. Costs 1 less than Spatial and hits more things, but 4 life can hurt a lot in multiples. Very useful for dealing with scary 2 drops on the draw since it only costs 1 mana. The life loss can hurt, but it's fair to think about how much damage your target will do to you before you find another answer for it. A triggered Swiftspear attacking you is going to beat you for 4 life whether you Dismember it or not, so you might as well get it gone. Against something less obvious however, a Thalia might not be able to hit you for 4 before you get a blocker in the way, but the effect of her tax is probably worth taking the risk to just get her off the board and let you keep playing your spells.

**0-1 OBLIVION STONE** – Very useful boardwipe that can be paid all at once with Tron or in instalments without, both of which are equally effective. Is also recurable with Academy Ruins for a board-lock and can put fate counters on things to save our own permanents from the explosion. If you're playing a more aggressive build with Karn and Thought-Knot Seer it's acceptable to omit this card to not destroy your own board presence.

**1-4 CHALICE OF THE VOID** – Our salt-mining prison card. The number of Chalice played mainboard vs sideboard vs at all is up for debate, but generally it's accepted that playing 3 in some combination of main and side is a good number. Your mileage may vary; Chalice is very meta dependant. The main advantage with Chalice in our deck is that it is often played on 1, only blanking four of our spells (Expedition Map), which usually come down earlier than the Chalice anyway, and can be discarded to Thirst for Knowledge to maintain value. Chalice is a very strong card, and is discussed in further detail in [Utility and Aggression](#).

**0-1 CYCLONIC RIFT** – Bounce spell in the early turns and can be a complete game-changer with Overload. Only seen as a 1 of since it doesn't cantrip and thus is card disadvantage.

**0-2 PSIONIC BLAST** – A direct damage spell that seems worse than Dismember until you realise it can go to face. Sometimes seen sided in as a 'gotcha' against Shadow decks but rarely sees mainboard play.

**0-2 MANA LEAK** – Despite not cantripping Mana Leak is still a strong early game imitator of Counterspell that only requires one blue source.

**0-1 FORCE OF NEGATION** – A staple of other control decks, Force is a very powerful card that lets you tap out for a threat and not have your shields completely down for the following turn. Whilst we just meet the criteria in most builds for the 17-18 other blue spells you theoretically need to be able to run Force, the card disadvantage coupled with the fact this requires double blue to be hardcast means Force is limited to a singleton if it's included at all.

**0-1 SPELL BURST** – A useful card for countering cheap spells that can get past Remand and Condescend, and also can be a hard lock in the late game with Tron. However, this card doesn't dig or cantrip, so space for it is hard to come by over the staple counterspells.

**0-1 WARPING WAIL** – A colourless charm. This has an attractive mana cost and an interesting array of abilities that are good in the right meta, but often just too narrow to be good, and doesn't dig. The first mode is clearly the strongest, allowing us to kill a whole bunch of creatures, but the counterspell and ramp can be relevant to. Overall a distinctly average yet playable card.

**0-2 SQUELCH** – This card is only playable because it replaces itself. Although primarily used against fetchlands as a cantripping Sinkhole, Squelch has a surprising number of relevant ways to delay your opponent.

This is not by any means of an exhaustive list of the control cards playable in this deck. However it serves to highlight why we play the cards we do. Hopefully the themes of flexibility, single-blue mana cost and digging are readily seen, and these concepts are useful for evaluating curveball additions to your own brews.

## CARD ADVANTAGE AND UTILITY

This section of the deck (with some exceptions) gives living space to the greatest number of flex spots. It allows for the most leniencies for personal preference, as the aim of this part of the engine is difficult to describe in a concise way. However, in general, these cards aim to generate card advantage and prepare our late game strategy in tandem with the control suite of the deck.

**4 THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE** – Our best nonland card in the deck. Thirst is always a 4-of and never boarded out. This is the card you want in your hand at all stages of the game and is discussed further in [Card Advantage and Value](#).

**3-4 EXPEDITION MAP** – This card's purpose is fairly apparent, it helps us find Tronlands or utility lands and does so extremely well. This is usually your best turn 1 play. Also pitchable to Thirst after you've put a Chalice on 1. Usually a 4-of, but can be cut down to 3 and is often boarded out entirely against Death and Taxes decks.

**0-2 TREASURE MAGE** – This is our Fabricate with a blocker attached, which is the reason we play it over Fabricate. This finds almost all of our threats and is card advantage if it trades with a creature or with a removal spell. Does annoyingly give a target for opponent's low level removal (Fatal Push, Abrupt Decay) which is otherwise largely dead against us, but occasionally you'll get an opponent waste a Path to Exile on this, which is great.

**0-1 TRINKET MAGE** – The other side of the Treasure Mage coin, this card is normally used as part of a package with a single Chalice, Engineered Explosives and Walking Ballista. Trinket can then find us a Map for lands, a Threat from Ballista, a boardwipe from EE or a Prison from Chalice, turning the card into a very flexible tutor.

**0-3 TALISMAN OF DOMINANCE** – A mana ramp artifact and another way to include blue sources. A few of these allow you to run more utility lands and are pitchable to Thirst in the late game, but can be destroyed to take you off colours and do cost life. Often played in the more aggressive builds to ramp into Karn or Thought-Knot Seer.

**0-3 MAZEMIND TOME** – A low cost incremental card advantage engine that can be used aggressively to gain life and be recurred with Karn, this card is an excellent addition to Thirst to help us stay ahead in card advantage and keep up with decks running Uro and Mystic Sanctuary. Even in faster matchups, this is pitchable to Thirst for value.

**0-4 THOUGHT-KNOT SEER** – A strong colourless card that is our only realistic form of targeted discard. This card is currently stronger than it's ever been thanks to the abundance of decks relying on Force of Negation. Using this to pave the way for your Karn or Ugin is very strong.

**0-1 SOLEMN SIMULACRUM** – A staple of EDH that has card advantage written all over it, whilst also fixing and ramping our mana. This is one of the best early game creatures you can play against Shadow and GBx decks, and curving Treasure Mage into this into the Wurmcoil you found is a strong line when you are nowhere near Tron.

**0-1 SNAPCASTER MAGE** – Although this is usually played as a 1-of since double blue to flashback spells is tough for us to have reliably, this card needs no introduction in control decks as it allows us to play our spells twice whilst blocking big creatures. Snapcaster is great.

**0-1 FACT OR FICTION** – This has a fantastic effect for a very easy mana cost for us. Fact or Fiction digs 5 deep and often creates an impossible choice for your opponent. The strength of this card is twofold; you can always choose to get the best card out of the top 5, and due to the tendency for opponents to have poor knowledge of our deck, you will often get a much better pile of cards than you would allow yourself if you were sat the other side of the table. Costing 4 mana to not affect the board is quite steep in Modern, however this card can dig you out of holes and provides a good function as a fifth Thirst.

**0-2 ANTICIPATE** – A very serviceable dig spell that is our version of Opt, since it still only costs us 1 blue source and dodges our own Chalice on 1. Generally regarded to be outclassed by Supreme Will thanks to the latter's flexibility, but Anticipate is still a very playable card if you're looking for more dig.

**0-1 TORRENTIAL GEARHULK** – Snapcaster's bigger brother. This card is a straight up value engine, allowing us to cast a big flash blocker and get a free Thirst, Dismember, Supreme Will, Remand, FoF, the list is endless. Unfortunately not as effective with our UX spells, but casting a Thirst for an extra 2U and getting a 5/6 tank on top is worth his inclusion. Gearhulk is also tutorable with Treasure Mage and Karn, and very useful against reactive decks to try and present a clock at the end of their turn as oppose to during ours.

**0-1 KARN, SCION OF URZA** – The overlooked iteration of Karn is a giant value engine that saw testing across a wide variety of Modern decks as soon as he was spoiled. The only real issue with Karn in UTron is that we have only a small number of artifacts that actually remain on the battlefield to allow Karn's constructs (which are often the only way we can protect him) to have any weight. Without this, Karn probably requires us to tap out for a turn and may allow the opponent to break through with a threat. Useful if your meta is extremely grindy as he will bury the opponent in cards if left unchecked.

**0-1 CRUCIBLE OF WORLDS** – Given that our lands are a key part of our strategy, this has a fairly obvious use of defending against land destruction. Crucible can also be used to pair with Ghost Quarter/Tectonic Edge/Field of Ruin for a repeatable land destruction engine of our own as another way to lock opponents out of the game. Crucible tends to be much better in longer, grinder games where you have time to get the engine online without having to miss interaction. Given our inclusion of Academy Ruins the engine is very hard to stop, as the opponent will need to kill both Crucible and Ruins on the same turn to stop one bringing back the other and the lock continuing.

**0-2 GIFTS UNGIVEN** – Gifts can be a very strong card if the deck is built to take advantage of it. Our deck can use this to find a suite of cards that all enact a variant of whatever answer we need at the time. Since our deck runs a lot of one-ofs, the ‘different names’ clause of Gifts is not such a restriction, and our recurrence of cards and tutoring allow for additional value packages. These include but are in no way limited to:

- **Last Tronland, Map, Crucible:** Whatever they give you, you’re getting the last Tronland. Could also include Ruins in the package, but you open them to putting Ruins and Crucible in the yard, and suddenly you have no way to Mindlock.
- **Mindslaver, Academy Ruins, Crucible, Buried Ruin:** You have Mindslaver Lock.
- **Ugin, OStone, Cyclonic Rift, EE:** You have a boardwipe. Could also include Walking Ballista or another good card like Wurmcoil or Thirst.
- **Snapcaster, Thirst, Condescend, Fact or Fiction:** You have a whole bunch of great cards.
- **Snapcaster, Gearhulk, Dismember, Spatial:** Whatever they give you, you have a choice of both removal spells.
- **Wurmcoil Engine, Treasure Mage, Academy Ruins:** You have Wurmcoil. Could also put in Gearhulk/Angel for additional fun.
- **Pithing Needle, Sorcerous Spyglass, Phyrexian Revoker:** A classic Gifts package of cards that all do the same thing.

This just gives an idea of what can be done with Gifts. It can be quite readily jammed into a ‘standard’ UTron list, however Gifts is best utilised by including more one-ofs and redundancy in card function, as well as more tutors and recursion effects. Gifts can get even more fun when you have cards the opponent simply cannot beat, like Chalice, since throwing these cards in the Gifts packages further restricts what the opponent can give you. Overall, instant speed and the variety of value plays make Gifts Ungiven a perfectly playable card.

The cards listed above are a short sample of the most common card advantage and utility cards played. Other cards that have seen play are things like Epiphany at the Drownyard, Glimmer of Genius and Pull from Tomorrow. As mentioned earlier this is the section of the deck with the most flexibility, and with the exception of Thirst for Knowledge, these cards are often temporarily removed to test new ideas and brews. Feel free to experiment, but try to remember the purpose of cards here is to advance our game plan and generate card advantage.

## THREATS AND STABILISERS

This is the fun part of the deck, and our reward for restricting our manabase with the Tronlands. Unfortunately, it’s the part that a lot of brews miss the mark on. When you have a lot of colourless mana available, there is an enormous pool of sledgehammer-looking cards to choose from that basically read ‘I win the game’. These can seem tempting, however our threat choices have to be quite specific due to the fact that they’re often played into an advanced board state, and have to stabilise that board as much as possible to allow us to start to turn the game

around. It's very rare that you'll be in a position of complete safety when you drop a big threat, and a sledgehammer isn't very useful when your opponent already has a knife to your throat. Choosing a threat whose only role in the game is offensive is not what we want.

Our threats have to be good enough to turn the game around when we're losing. Unfortunately, 'losing' in Modern takes on a wide variety of forms. It could be anything from one big creature about to beat you down (Death's Shadow), several little creatures about to chip you to death (Humans, Merfolk), our opponent about to combo off (Storm, Ad Nauseam, Amulet) or get the last Burn or Mill spell in and kill us that way. The point is that not only do our threats have to bring us back from near execution, they have to be flexible enough to save us against different guillotines. An added bonus is if they can help us win after we stabilise.

Another important bonus for our threats is for them to be artifacts. Our inclusions of Academy Ruins, Thirst for Knowledge and Karn/Treasure Mage make the reasoning for these conditions obvious; suffice to say that being able to tutor up a variety of stabilisers for use against different strategies is a powerful tool.

Since War of the Spark, the threat suite of any UTron build starts with a single question:

*Am I running 0 or 4 copies of Karn, the Great Creator?*



**0 OR 4 KARN, THE GREAT CREATOR** – This card has changed the face of multiple decks in Modern since his printing. Even after being de-fanged with the banning of Mycosynth Lattice, Karn proves his ability to provide a toolbox sideboard of hate pieces, locks and wincons that cement his place as a 'kill-on-sight' card. Coupled with his static ability to shut down artifact strategies simply by existing, Karn has earned his place in our deck just as rightfully as he has in the relevant builds of Gx and Eldrazi Tron. Karn comes with a great deal of considerations for both the

makeup of his ‘Karnboard’ and the right way to use the card. Karn’s sideboard and strategy are discussed more in [Stabilisers, Threats and Wincons](#), with the focus here being on answering the above question.

The decision to include Karn is entirely down to player choice. A number of advantages and disadvantages are included here to help the reader make an informed decision, however it is in this author’s opinion strictly correct to either not run the card at all or run 4; if you’re damaging your sideboard to make room for Karn’s toolbox, you want the maximum utility out of it.

For this list, Karn has been compared to the traditional Treasure Mage packages that UTron classically uses.

#### Advantages:

- **Raw Power:** The greatest advantage to Karn is simply how powerful the card is. Karn is a hate piece, a lock piece, a stabiliser and a wincon all in one card and can win games simply by existing. He starts on a high loyalty, has a low mana cost and has a relevant uptick that allows you to pull tricks like Dismembering your opponent’s noncreature artifacts. He is not a fair card and will up the overall power of your deck just by being in it.
- **Versatility and Repeatability:** Related to the above advantage, Karn has the ability to tutor far more than just a 6+ CMC artifact, and has the potential to continue to do so if our opponent cannot deal with him. This flexible card advantage can be game winning and aligns well to our philosophy as a control deck.
- **No blue-source required:** A well known issue for UTron in the past has been a fast completion of Tron to leave a main phase board state of Mine, Power-Plant, Tower and Island with the desire to begin pressuring the opponent whilst holding up interaction. Previously, this was impossible, as Treasure Mage required us to tap our blue source, and Wurmcoil left us with solely the Island or a Tronland untapped. Karn allows you to commit a serious threat to the board (himself), whilst holding up 3U for relevant interaction and the promise of a huge threat or crippling hate piece next turn.
- **Reduced CMC Spread:** Karn allows you to move higher-CMC threats into the sideboard to be fetched as needed. This lowers the CMC cost of your win conditions, and improves the winrate of games where you are far from Tron, as Karn can do a good deal of damage with Ballista and Liquimetal Coasting without having to have buckets of mana for the Sundering Titan that would otherwise be stuck in our hand.
- **Mainboard Stony Silence:** You’re playing against Urza? Cool, their combo doesn’t work now. Ad Nauseum? Nice Lotus Bloom with no text on it. Vial Decks? Our counterspells are relevant again. Karn has the ability to just shut off random pieces of your opponent’s deck just by existing and will win you games because of it.

#### Disadvantages:

- **RIP Sideboard:** Karn’s obvious big disadvantage: to make him effective you will have to dedicate anywhere between 7 to 10 cards of your sideboard to cards that are never really switched in. We are a control deck and we need to have space for a range of relevant sideboard cards. Using Karn makes your sideboard incredibly tight and you’ll have to sacrifice winrate percentages against some matchups.
- **4 Mana vs 3:** Treasure Mage comes down one turn earlier. Sometimes you need a Wurmcoil Engine right now, and you have 9 mana to spend. Other times you’re on 5 mana and have to wait another turn before being able to advance your board state and hold up Remand.
- **Karn Doesn’t Block:** This is likely Karn’s second biggest disadvantage – against aggressive decks Treasure Mage had the fantastic role of advancing your gameplan whilst chumping against a threat to buy you time. Karn does the former brilliantly, but cannot do the latter and sometimes just sits in your hand as a dead card because you cannot afford to tap out. This is coupled with the above disadvantage; in this situation you are forced to survive one more turn before safely playing Karn whilst holding up a piece of interaction. This disadvantage is mildly

alleviated against poorer players who will tunnel-vision a resolved Karn to attack into it at times they should be attacking you, but this cannot be relied on and giving the opponent the choice is always worse than having a 2/2 they have to spend a turn walking into.

- **Karn Doesn't Attack:** Despite being a real disadvantage, this is often solved by Karn's ability to +1 an artifact (Map, Talisman) and provide an attacker. The trade-off here is that Treasure Mage passively tutors whilst being able to attack, whereas Karn is forced to choose between the two. Karn's attacker, however, will likely be able to attack the turn Karn comes down.
- **Force of Negation:** This is a real consideration; Treasure Mage cannot be Forced and Karn can.

Overall, this author believes that Karn should be run as a 4-of. The card has real disadvantages and can feel stuck in your hand in aggressive matchups, but the raw power combined with the current value-orientated Modern metagame demands a threat that is both versatile and punishing, and Karn has the capability to provide a range of roles all in one card. The current metagame sees our deck less able to simply tap out for an 8-mana threat and ensure it will take over the game – rather we are required to ensure our threat both resolves and can be protected, and Karn's mana cost is perfect for us to be able to hold up our interaction whilst putting pressure on our opponent.

Once the Karn question has been answered, the rest of our threat suite can be considered:

**1-3 WURMCOIL ENGINE** – This card is our classic stabiliser against most forms of aggro. Decks that want to attack with creatures or chip at your life total will have a hard time beating this. Wurmcoil also does extremely well against midrange decks not running white, like Death's Shadow or GBx decks. Here it provides such value as they get rid of it that you can usually pull ahead in card advantage, which is what usually matters most in those matchups. Wurmo's natural enemy is Path to Exile, which is a very clean answer to it and stops both the split into tokens and the recurring of Wurm with Ruins. Chalice on 1 is usually a good precursor to playing Wurm against white decks. Wurm is also very castable without Tron, and delaying the game until we have 6 lands isn't a problem for our deck. If Karn is being run, Wurmcoil is usually run as a 0-1 in the main and 1 in the board.

**1-2 MINDSLAVER** – This card is primarily used to form half of our inevitability package and can be run either in the main or in the Karnboard. This allows us to prolong the game indefinitely, knowing we will eventually win. Mindslaver is also very strong against some decks as a one-shot, since even controlling a player for one turn can allow you to completely cripple their game. Mindslaver is one of the most essential cards for our deck and is discussed in more depth in [Stabilisers, Threats and Wincons](#).

**0-1 PLATINUM ANGEL** – A single Platinum Angel is a staple in most builds, though some do cut it or relegate it to the sideboard. Some decks just straight up can't beat this card, and those that can might have to spend time drawing into their removal, which could allow you to stabilise. Wonderfully, we're a control deck and so once Angel is down we can concentrate on protecting her. A number of games end up with the UTron player thinking 'well, if I untap with Angel, I probably win'. She can be a mainboard or Karnboard card.

**0-1 SUNDERING TITAN** – Previously omitted from most decklists, this card has made a strong recurrence with the rise of UGx Uro control piles and their delicious fetch-shock manabases. Make no mistake, this card is a complete blowout against greedy manabases and forms a gigantic wall that promises to repeat the one sided Armageddon if it's removed in any way. A lot of the power of the card comes from the second ability reading 'leaves the battlefield' as oppose to 'dies', not only ensuring the trigger always occurs but allowing you to start bouncing your own Titan and replaying it to destroy more lands. Care is required as this will destroy our own Islands if the opponent doesn't have any. As it cannot be hit with Force of Negation this card is seen in both the mainboard and is a staple in the Karnboard.

**0-1 BATTERSKULL** – This card is best described as Wurmcoil Engine’s smaller brother. Very easily castable without Tron and has a good array of abilities to latch onto another creature and bounce itself to protect or if we need it to actually generate a threat again. Batterskull has two main weaknesses; CMC 5 means it can’t be found with Treasure Mage, and the token is soft to Fatal Push, which is otherwise dead against us. Despite this, Batterskull is a strong early stabiliser against aggro decks and is very playable, although likely not worth a spot in the Karnboard.

**UGIN, THE SPIRIT DRAGON** – A staple in all decks running Tronlands, Ugin is a complete house against strategies that need coloured permanents to win. Typically, Ugin comes down, wipes the board with his -X, then ticks up against remaining threats or the opponent’s face with his +2 until he needs to -X again or can win the game with his ultimate. Despite being suboptimal against control or combo decks (which use spells or manlands to win instead of permanents), Ugin is an enormously powerful card and very often one of the best things we can do with our Tronlands. Even if we are running Karn, a singleton Ugin is pretty much always in the deck.

**1-4 WALKING BALLISTA** – Ballista is a removal spell, a threat, a direct damage spell, planeswalker killer and most importantly a mana sink all in one card. Often one of the best spells to have in your hand, it can be used with Tron as a giant wincon or played early then pumped at the end of your opponent’s turn if you have nothing better to do, ensuring you’re always using your mana. Can also be recurred with Academy Ruins for repeatable direct damage and can often provide a sacrificial alpha strike to snap you an unexpected win. Ballista is a fantastic card.

**0-1 EMRAKUL, THE PROMISED END** – A very powerful game-ender, New’mrakul is a great combination of stabilisation with the on-cast Mindslaver, and a strong threat that you’ll hopefully be able to strip away any answers to. Unfortunately we can’t take too much advantage of her discount clause, since (barring tactically discarding cards with Thirst) it’s likely we have only instant, artifact and occasionally land or creature in the graveyard, meaning Emrakul usually costs us 10 or 11. Despite this, Emrakul sees inclusion in a few brews and is definitely playable.

As with other sections of the deck, there are a lot of other cards that see play and see success. Cards like Myr Battlesphere and Steel Hellkite are all viable inclusions in UTron, and there’s a good deal of room to customise your threat selection to your meta. Just keep in mind the important requirement that these cards should aim to stabilise a game you’re about to lose, not overkill one you were winning anyway.

## SIDEBOARDING

The sideboarding suite of any deck is hard to pin down in writing, due to meta shifts driving constant changes and personal preference having a large impact. As we are a control deck with the potential to make a ton of mana, there are a wide variety of cards available to us that can stop different strategies. With that in mind, this section will aim to introduce a number of common sideboard cards and describe their roles to inform choice when brewing.

This section will refer to cards that are not specific to Karn, the Great Creator's wishboard. The construction of the Karnboard is discussed further in [Stabilisers, Threats and Wincons](#).

### AGGRO WEAKNESSES

It's no secret UTron is weaker to fast decks. We have a number of sideboard options to try and shore up against decks that are trying to kill us as soon as they can.

**SPATIAL CONTORTION** – As seen earlier in the maindeck, it's an option to have more in the sideboard.

**DISMEMBER** – As seen earlier in the maindeck, it's an option to have more in the sideboard.

**SILENT ARBITER** – A good stonewall against swarm aggro decks, this can often buy you enough time to stabilise fully with Wurmcoil or Angel, or just win with Ugin. Toughness 5 is also very useful to block the one creature that can attack.

**CHALICE OF THE VOID** – As seen earlier in the maindeck, it's an option to have more in the sideboard.

**ENGINEERED EXPLOSIVES** – A low cost sweeper than can be a complete game winner against a swarm of tokens or low cost creatures. EE also has good game against decks like Prowess, 8Rack and Bogles. It's advisable to have a way of producing colours other than blue when making use of EE, using UB dual lands like River of Tears or Underground River. You can also pump colourless mana into EE's cost to get it past a Chalice.

**HURKY'S RECALL** – Fallen out of favour with the decline of aggressive artifact strategies, but this is still useful against anything that needs artifacts on the board to win (Urza, Hardened Scales). This followed by Chalice on the correct number can often trap a lot of spells in your opponent's hand and win you the game.

**BOTTLE GNOMES** – Block, sac, gain 3. Toughness 3 is also nice to form a small wall for a bit, and pitchable to Thirst.

**STEEL WALL** – A small turn-one speedbump against smaller aggro decks and burn. Good mostly because it only costs one mana, and is pitchable to Thirst.

**BATTERSKULL** – as this comes down a turn before Wurmcoil, it's an option to run more of these in the side to try and stabilise earlier.

**AETHER GUST** – A powerful card with a wide range of applications, most blue sideboards have adopted anywhere from 2 to 4 copies of this. Most relevant in this section against the Burn and Prowess decks, this also has utility against many other strategies and gets past things like Cavern of Souls.

## GRAVEYARD HATE

**GRAFDIGGERS CAGE** – This card is often seen as weaker graveyard hate, as it's a 'softer' prison hate card than those that directly exile everything. It can also be removed eventually. However its utility comes from it also stopping cards like Finale of Devastation and Collected Company, the latter of which especially is a tough card for us if it resolves. Overall it's a wide prison card that we can protect if needs be, and is an artifact for Thirst, which makes it a great sideboard card.

**RELIC OF PROGENITUS** – First ability can be clunky since the opponent gets the choice, however this cantrips when it ultimates, making Relic a good inclusion.

**TORMOD'S CRYPT** – A cheaper Relic that doesn't cantrip, but leaves our graveyard intact and isn't stopped by Chalice on 1, which is useful. Another playable option.

**ASHIOK, DREAM RENDER** – Repeatable graveyard hate whilst also having a static that turns off fetchlands, this card is a staple in most sideboards that can run him.

**LEYLINE OF THE VOID** – This card is really, really good against graveyard decks. Too big for Abrupt Decay and not hit by Ancient Grudge, this should stick around longer than the other options we have. The tradeoff for this is fairly obvious – we basically have no way of casting it outside of it being in our opener, meaning it's a dead card that can't be pitched valuably to Thirst. Used if your meta includes a lot of graveyard decks and you want to aggressively mulligan towards this, but otherwise too restrictive to go in the average sideboard.

**BOJUKA BOG/SCAVENGER GROUNDS** – Slightly different manifestations of the same idea: restricting your manabase to include a tutorable one-shot graveyard hate effect. The fact that one produces black mana over colourless mana is fairly irrelevant over the much larger consideration of neither of these cards producing blue mana. The main trade-offs here are:

- Bog enters tapped, but lets you keep the land as oppose to having to sacrifice.
- Scavenger lets you play the land as a normal land whilst holding up the exile effect at instant speed. To effectively use Bog you may have to hold back on making your land drop with it.

With this in mind, this primer would advise Scavenger Grounds over Bog. The untapped clause is nice, but the main aspect is being able to use the land as a land before committing to the exile effect. Doubled with the fact that you can use the ability at instant speed, Scavenger Grounds' flexibility gives it the edge over Bog. With that said, the mana restriction of these cards mean that their inclusion is likely only warranted in a graveyard-heavy meta.

## LAND HATE

**SPREADING SEAS** – This card is great because it cantrips. We can also move it onto other lands if they become a bigger issue. Having a Tron opponent play another Tower after your turned the first into an Island lets you just Repeal the Seas and put it on the Mine in your turn, whilst also drawing 2 cards.

**FIELD OF RUIN/GHOST QUARTER/TECTONIC EDGE** – As discussed in [Manabase](#), there are all very viable land destruction options, with Field of Ruin the usual choice given that it doesn't put us down a land and can become a blue source. However, if you have a Field of Ruin in the mainboard it may be correct to play another option in the side for flexibility. Ghost Quarter is also likely the better option to pair with Crucible of Worlds if you're including that package.

**DAMPING SPHERE** – This seems like a strange inclusion for our deck given that it stops our Tronlands too, but we have a much better chance of winning without them than other decks that play Sol lands. Turning UTron vs GxTron into a 'fair' matchup usually means we win with our counterspells. We can also Repeal the Sphere if we ever need to, or we manage to take the opponent off their advantage. Sphere is also a good card against Storm.

#### COMBO MORE LIKE NONBO

**PITHING NEEDLE/SORCEROUS SPYGLASS/PHYREXIAN REVOKER** – Needle effects are all good choices. They can name cards like Lightning Storm to completely stop some decks, or provide good utility against planeswalkers, manlands and fetchlands. Spyglass is best suited to our deck, as the information gained is great for us as a control deck, and it doesn't get stopped by our Chalice on 1.

**SUMMARY DISMISSAL/WHIRLWIND DENIAL** – The counters to end all counters, these essentially read 'Counter the stack'. Dismissal in particular is very useful for dealing with uncounterable spells, activated abilities and cast triggers, and also performs well letting a Storm player combo off then exiling 20 copies of Grapeshot. Expensive and Dismissal does cost double blue, but these can often be a complete blowout.

**SPELLSKITE** – As it's always been, Spellskite is a great card for eating your opponents spells, and performs well against anything trying to point damage at your face. Usually flat out wins against Bogles and Infect and can also protect your Angel. Can be used again Burn and Valakut to turn Bolts into Shocks.

**SURGICAL EXTRACTION** – A card that needs no introduction, Surgical has been stopping combo decks in their tracks since it was printed by precisely removing the key piece needed for the combo to go off. Can occasionally be paid for by your dual lands that produce black, but be careful of Chalice on 1.

**ASHIOK, DREAM RENDER** – This is included here again for its utility against Scapeshift and Titan decks. They cannot use their cards effectively whilst this is on the field, and for that reason it is common play to not downtick the Ashiok, ensuring they have the hardest time possible removing it.

**AETHER GUST** – This card also gains an additional mention here for its insane utility against Amulet Titan decks. Gust is a great counterspell against their namesake card

## CONTROL PILES

**CAVERN OF SOULS** – This is used to force through Thought-Knot Seer, Walking Ballista and/or Sundering Titan, all of which are very good against control piles.

**FACT OR FICTION** – As with the main, it's an option to have an additional copy in the sideboard.

**NIMBLE OBSTRUCTIONIST** – This card forms a nice clock, a flash threat for planeswalkers and can be used as a cycling Wasteland against fetches. This usually has something relevant to hit and if not, a 3/1 Flash body is a good clock.

**RELIC OF PROGENITUS/GRAFDIGGER'S CAGE/TORMOD'S CRYPT** – These are discussed in [Graveyard Hate](#), but deserve additional mention here due to the current popularity of UGx control piles featuring Uro, Titan of Nature's Wrath and Mystic Sanctuary. Good graveyard hate will shut these cards down and the rest of the deck becomes a lot less powerful without them. Relic is likely the best option here, as it cantrip and can do its job even if answered.

**0-2 SHARK TYPHOON** – Sharknado shines as a way to provide an uncounterable cantripping beater at instant speed. The shark can threaten planeswalkers, provide a clock or simply provide card advantage if they have to spend a card removing it. Our deck especially can use Tron to make the shark enormous and we have an added bonus of being able to realistically cast the card and generate tokens as we continue the game.

There are many other cards that can see acceptable inclusions in sideboards, depending on your meta. Different counterspells like Mana Leak, Spell Pierce/Snare, along with other utility and draw spells like Glimmer of Genius, Frantic Inventory and Chemister's Insight are all valid sideboard cards. Find out what works for you and get some games in to test. As a control deck, your sideboard should be very dynamic and change with the metagame.

## REJECTED CARDS

Due to the green variants of Tron being more popular and more infamous than UTron, people new to building the deck often mistake us for being a Tron deck that splashes blue, as oppose to a blue deck that splashes Tron. Both new players and new opponents of the deck make the error of thinking we play the same threats and cards that Gx Tron plays. You will often see inexperienced opponents name Karn Liberated with Meddling Mage.

Another pothole to fall into is forgetting that our threats are required to stabilise a board more than just beat the opponent down. Our threats continue our early game plan of stopping our opponent's deck from winning. Failing to appreciate this fully can lead to a lot of incorrect threat choices, from cards that are too narrow, not effective enough at stabilising or whose only role is to try and hammer the opponent to death.

Additionally, this section will include some cards that seem to fit the control and manabase sections of our deck, but either violate the card advantage and digging style of control we play, or are not worth losing a basic Island for.

This sections aims to talk about a number of the cards newcomers would expect us to play, and explain why they aren't right for our deck.

## THREATS

### KARN LIBERATED

If you are playing GxTron, you play 4 Karn Liberated. The primary objective of your deck is to have this card resolve on your turn three. Here, he starts exiling your opponent's lands and eating through their hand before they've even got into the game. Turn three Karn is the primary reason a lot of people dislike Tron; it is an absurdly powerful play and either outright causes a concession or leaves you opponent with one land on their next turn, staring down 7 mana and a huge planeswalker, with the looming threat of additional powerhouse cards coming in the following turns. So why doesn't UTron play Karn?

The answer is pretty simple; Karn doesn't stabilise an advanced board. We're not in the business of reliably getting him out early enough to play him aggressively like GxTron does, and in the later game Karn just isn't very effective. Chances are you're facing down lots of creatures or your opponent is looking to combo off and you need a card that stops them doing this. Exiling a single permanent or card in their hand is usually not going to stop a deck that's about to win, and next turn you're probably losing your Karn. It's just not a card that stabilises a developed board and so doesn't fit into our deck.

Karn is also not an artifact, so we can't tutor for him. This fundamental requirement of our threat selection is only relaxed for cards that are incredibly strong if they resolve, like Ugin or Emrakul, the Promised End. On top of this, when we get to Tron we will basically always have at least one other land down in the form of a blue source, so Ugin's cost of 8 mana isn't a huge difference to Karn's 7, and Ugin is a much better late game stabiliser than Karn.

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### ULAMOG, THE CEASELESS HUNGER

Karn on steroids. Ulamog is GxTron's enormous game finisher. Coming down as an indestructible 10/10 that kills you even if you can block and bringing his friend the essentially uncounterable double Vindicate is something that ends games extremely quickly. Ulamog is very strong, however the issue with Ulamog is very similar to that of Karn; he's only that good if you can play him unreasonably early, or following up a Karn that your opponent has crippled themselves having to deal with. We're not doing either of those things. We are not in the game of getting Tron online quickly and throwing big scary things at our opponent hoping they're good enough. We control what our opponent is doing until we have the *right* stabilising threat that their strategy can't win through. Consider Ulamog against an advanced swarm aggro deck about to kill us – he exiles two creatures and then the rest swing past him for the win. Here, Ugin, OStone, Angel and even maybe Wurmcoil or Rift would be better cards to have. Against a combo or control deck, a late Ulamog could exile some lands, but the combo deck just throws spells at us and the control deck just Paths the Ulamog and keeps going. Here Karn TGC, Angel or holding up counters would be so much better. Ulamog is by no means bad, but we have much better cards we could be casting for 10 mana given our strategy.

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### EMRAKUL, THE AEONS TORN

Emrakul, the Aeons Torn is the biggest, baddest, most scary thing you can do in Magic. Emrakul is the ultimate big red button, and in 90% percent of situations simply reads '15: You win the game'. Given that we want to go on as long as possible and have a completely reasonable chance of generating the mana to cast Emrakul, why don't we play her as our ultimate inevitability package?

Mindslaver and Academy Ruins. Slaver lock is our inevitability package. Not only does it win the game more reliably than Emrakul, but crucially both cards slot into our deck far better and are very useful without assembling the lock. Until you can cast her, Emrakul is a dead card. Slaver is very useful as a one-shot and can easily win the game that way, and Ruins is our best land after Island. If either of those are ever banned (they won't be) then perhaps the Flying Spaghetti Monster will see play in our deck. But until then, she is simply outclassed in flexibility.

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### BLIGHTSTEEL COLOSSUS

Ok, so our threats should be artifacts, right? So let's use the biggest artifact creature around! Blightsteel Colossus is the phyrexian version of his predecessor Darksteel Colossus, and as a result gets bigger and has Infect, meaning it can win the game in one swing against small blockers. Being an artifact and having CMC over 6, why don't we play this card to tutor up and close out games when we're ahead?

The answer here is in the question – 'when we're ahead'. Blightsteel is a very strong threat, but it's *only* a threat and he's *only* useful when we're already doing well. The only stabilisation this card is doing is blocking one creature, which is far too narrow to consider his inclusion. Apart from very odd theoretical cases, any game that Blightsteel can win, any other of our tutorable threats can also win. But all those other threats can stabilise far more flexibly and are a lot more readily playable without Tron than Blightsteel.

## CONTROL CARDS

### REALITY SHIFT

This card is so good-looking that it sometimes takes playing with it for a while before its weakness is realised. The benefits of Reality Shift are obvious; it's an unconditional creature exile with a low blue requirement at instant speed that dodges our Chalice on 1. It's so annoyingly close to being good. If it made a 2/2 token, it would likely be playable, but having that token be able to flip into a Tarmogoyf or a Death's Shadow, or at the very worst letting your opponent turn an otherwise dead next draw into a viable threat is not ok. Reality Shift is at best 'card disadvantage', at worst '1U: to turn a Tarmogoyf into a bigger Tarmogoyf'. It is, very sadly, not playable.

## LANDS

### SANCTUM OF UGIN

Sanctum of Ugin in GxTron does a distinctly average job of filling the gap left by Eye of Ugin, a card that allowed GxTron's otherwise redundant land tutors to find threats after they'd found Tron. It lets them follow a threat with another for the cost of a land, which is conducive to GxTron's idea of going all out on throwing threats at its opponent. UTron's gameplan is longer and more patient, and our threats are chosen to do well by themselves against an established board. Playing a Platinum Angel and being able to get a follow-up Wurmcoil is pretty good, but is much worse than untapping with the Angel with a wall of counterspells in your hand, and not having just sacrificed a precious land. Sanctum also only triggers from cards with a CMC of 7 or greater, so doesn't fire off when we play a Wurm, or Gearhulk, or Slaver. We also have better tutors in the form of Treasure Mage and Karn, and plenty of dig to get to our bigger cards. It's not worth taking out an Island for, and we really don't want to be sacrificing lands.

### MYSTIC SANCTUARY

An arguably completely broken card, Sanctuary is a staple of nearly all other control decks for its ability to use your graveyard as a second hand, lock players out the game with Cryptic Command and combo with fetchlands for topdeck manipulation. Unfortunately for us, Mystic Sanctuary requires three *other* Islands to do its thing, and this just isn't a reliable requirement for us to satisfy. We also can't exploit the card with fetchlands, and don't include Cryptic Command for the ability to combat-lock our opponents. Overall, Sanctuary is firmly in the stack of horrible cards we can't run but wish we could.

## UTILITY CARDS

### SERUM VISIONS

Serum Visions is often used in control and combo decks to spend turn one sculpting their next few draws. The reason it isn't included in UTron is not solely because it makes playing Chalice on 1 a whole lot worse, but mainly due to it being sorcery speed, and the fact that it pales in comparison to Thirst for Knowledge. On turn 1, we would much rather play a Map than this, or even hold up Dismember. On any turn after, we have to have two blue sources up to make any use of this card, since no UTron player is going to tap their only blue source for Serum Visions on their turn and sacrifice being able to hold up, or at least bluff, interaction for the next turn. After turn 3, Thirst is just better than Serum Visions, and castable at the end of your opponent's turn.

### OPT

Opt found its way into Modern thanks to its printing in the Ixalan block. The card is used widely as a version of Serum Visions that trades dig depth for the ability to play it at the end of your opponent's turn after holding up interaction. This advantage should make Opt a possible inclusion in UTron, however the blue source bottleneck of our manabase once again makes cards like Anticipate or Thirst better options, since they are much stronger and still only cost one blue source. Opt is also blanked by Chalice on 1, and it doesn't do a good enough imitation of extra Thirsts for it to be worth including.

## HOW TO PLAY THE DECK

This section covers aspects of strategy and decisions when piloting UTron. Due to the flexibility of deck construction making discussing specific tactics difficult, this section will assume a fairly ‘standard’ build, using cards described in [Deck Construction](#). Additionally, since UTron is anything but linear, this section does not have the luxury of being able to concisely describe a detailed method of executing a single game plan and maximising its resilience. The interactive style of our deck means it’s only realistic to provide a high-level guide of play lines and thought processes, including some examples to demonstrate certain decisions.

## YOUR OPPONENT'S DECK

Your opponent's deck is your first and foremost consideration. Playing UTron effectively absolutely requires knowledge of how your opponent is trying to win, and more specifically knowledge of their key cards that enable that strategy. Since it's rare that you'll be able to stop every card they play, knowing which cards to interact with is critical to maintaining control of the game. This section will describe a few categories of deck classification and give a brief overview of how our deck can best deal with them.

### AGGRO, CONTROL, MIDRANGE OR COMBO

Most decks you face can be characterised into one of these archetypes. This in no way fully defines the deck you're facing, but does give you a good idea of how the game is going to progress, the important high level concepts and therefore which types of cards in your deck are more suited to the situation.

**AGGRO** decks are trying to overwhelm you with damage before you've had a chance to fight back. This requires you to survive the initial onslaught until you can bring down cards their cheaper spells can't compete with. The cards to prioritise are those that either do the most damage (Reality Smasher), incremental, evasive damage (Eidolon of the Great Revel) or compound the damage of other threats (Thalia's Lieutenant).

Running the aggro player out of gas is important, as your card advantage won't matter in the early stages of the game where the aggro player is trying to fight. To this end, removal and boardwipes are the strongest elements of our deck. If you're on a reasonable life total when the blitzkrieg is over your cards are all stronger than one small threat per turn, and you have more of them, so you can start to climb to your feet again and take over. Often they will get a decent amount of damage through in the early game, and you should focus on denying them their reach and maintaining your remaining points of life until you have a stabiliser down, at which point you can turn the game around.

**CONTROL** decks are the opposite to aggro; you'll have a great deal of time and the focus should be on making sure you hit your land drops and maintain card advantage right from the off. Since we are also a control deck, the two most important concepts are card advantage and clocks. The games are inevitably going to go on for a long time so any threat serves as a respectable clock, as it forces the other player to play proactively, which isn't something control decks do well at.

Important cards are therefore anything that can provide a clock (Snapcaster Mage, Uro, Titan of Nature's Wrath) or provide card advantage for the opponent (Jace, the Mind Sculptor, Uro again). As we have a superior mana advantage, we are happy for the game to go on as long as possible, allowing us to lever that advantage into playing threats whilst never tapping out. We can also use this to initiate proxy counter wars, baiting the opponent to tap out over a relatively minor threat and giving us a clear path to land either a much larger threat or Mindslayer lock.

**MIDRANGE** decks hover between aggro and control. They play a proactive strategy that cares about card advantage and try to grind the opponent out of the game by playing lots of 2 for 1s like Lingering Souls, Kolaghan's Command and Bloodbraid Elf. Often a midrange deck will be defined as playing the most efficient value cards in the chosen colour combination, ensuring their draws are all isolated gas.

Since midrange decks are trying to win by grinding out proactive card advantage, we have a very strong matchup here. The only serious worry is the tendency for these decks to run a number of one mana discard spells, which can hamper us quite severely as we need to hold cards in our hand. Apart from that, our normal game plan of gaining value with our counterspells and drawing card advantage fares extremely well, as Thirst for Knowledge proves its ability to dominate a grindy matchup. Other good card advantage engines like Solemn Simulacrum and Karn TGC are dripping with value and so good choices. We also win on the threat front, as they match our style of playing isolated singular strong threats, except that ours are just objectively more powerful, and we have Tron to cast them at the same rate.

**COMBO** decks are trying to play a particular combination of cards that either outright win, create an unlosable game state or provide an insurmountable advantage. This archetype stands slightly apart from the other three, but can be sub-classified within them. Aggro-combo decks (Goblins, Storm) are usually trying to force their combo as soon as possible whereas control-combo decks (Through the Breach, Yorion Scapeshift) seek to delay the opponent and protect the combo as it goes through. Midrange combo decks (VizerDruid, Dimir Whirza) are usually primarily midrange decks that have a combo element included within them to snap occasional wins out of nowhere.

Dealing with combo decks is where knowledge and quick recognition of the opponent's deck is most vital. You have to be aware of how the combo works so you can save your interaction for what matters. Usually the strategy is to let them play their set-up cards that don't directly enact the combo (Sakura-Tribe Elder, Phyrexian Unlife) and save your counters for winning the war over their key combo pieces (Gifts Ungiven, Primeval Titan, Ad Nauseam). Always bear in mind that a lot of these decks will have ways of forcing through their combos with cards like Pact of Negation and Dispel, so Chalice always has a role to play in allowing you to win the counter wars. Since they have the ability to win out of nowhere from an otherwise unthreatening board, tapping out is almost never advised unless you're completely sure they can't kill you next turn. Overall, our plentiful interaction and array of counterspells make most combo decks a good matchup. After they've failed to force the combo through we can prevent them digging for the pieces again and win with any form of clock.

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#### PROACTIVE VS REACTIVE

All games of Magic are defined by one side taking the form of the 'beatdown' deck and one taking the form of the 'control' deck. The beatdown role is to take the initiative with threats and kill their opponent faster, whereas the control role is to survive the beatdown and prolong the game into a state where their inevitability will win. This is a fairly fundamental concept, and is usually decided by which deck has the faster goldfish; which of the two would kill a deck of basic lands first. Even in an aggro vs aggro matchup, one player will be inherently slower than the other

and have to provide some form of interaction to stop the opponent's quicker clock. Similarly, for control mirrors, the deck that generally generates the least card advantage or has less inevitability will try and present a clock and force the opponent to remove it.

UTron is as far toward the reactive end of the scale as any deck can be. We have superior card advantage and formidable inevitability with Mindslaver lock. We do have the ability to present powerful clocks with the cards we can power out with Tronlands, but this is usually just a way of harassing the opponent to stall the game further. This means the opponent's deck will very often take a proactive role; trying to end the game before we have our mana and card advantage online and take over.

**PROACTIVE** decks allow us to play our control game unimpeded, safe in the knowledge that we're likely not going to be fought too hard on the stack. The games should largely consist of the opponent playing sorcery-speed cards into our interaction, and is usually decided by them either getting a threat to stick or running out of anything meaningful to do. Playing against proactive decks feels easier and safer for UTron, since we can comfortably organise our spells knowing we won't be punished at instant speed for tapping out on their turn. However, good pilots of proactive decks will try and bait us into letting them resolve instant-speed haymakers like Collected Company or Whir of Invention so it's worth being wary of the opponent has a lot of unused mana at the end of their turn with cards in hand. A VizerDruid player leaving three untapped lands and a Hierarch they didn't attack you with passing the turn is likely going to punish you for tapping out for Thirst.

**REACTIVE** decks require more thought. It is in these matchups that card advantage is most key, since the matches are often decided in the late midgame or early endgame. Since both decks are best suited to reactive play, the player who tries to resolve a key spell first is going to have a tougher time, as they'll have less mana remaining for the inevitable counter war. The general advice is to try and hit land drops every turn, concentrate on resolving Thirsts and Maps to get towards your card and mana advantage, and force them to play proactively. The longer the game goes on, the closer we get to our final inevitability with Mindslaver lock, so we can focus on drawing into a stage where we're ready to lock and then fighting over a proxy threat in their turn to bait them into tapping out.

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#### ESSENTIAL VS REDUNDANT

It is important to know if the deck you're facing has a few key cards are required for them to win, or are piles of functionally similar cards that win once they reach a critical mass. Essential decks are usually combo-style decks or decks full of specific hate or prison cards that are required to find the right one to stop whatever they're facing. Redundant decks can take on many forms, but examples are tribal aggro decks, Burn decks and conventional control decks.

**ESSENTIAL** decks tend to be easier for UTron to control, since we can save our counters for the key cards that enable the opponent's strategy. These are not necessarily always combo pieces, but could include cards that compound the threat of the other cards in the deck, like Amulet of Vigor. Decks that play in this way force us to have a very good knowledge of their payoff cards, since these can quickly swing the game in their favour. The good news is that if we can stop these payoff cards, the deck often has little else to do and we have a lot of time to win, meaning we can concentrate less on having to build card advantage in favour of always having interaction ready for a combo.

**REDUNDANT** decks require us to lean on our card advantage. Here we need to have more answers than the opponent has threats to prevent them building up a critical mass. This is theoretically more difficult, but the saving grace here is that each single card they have is not an instant game winning threat in itself. This allows us to be

flexible and use our softer removal to hold the opponent from building up too big a board presence until we can stabilise. When facing a lot of threats that are functionally similar, it's vital to consider how your interaction lines up with what you know you're going to face. This could be a simple decision, like waiting for turn 2 to cast Spatial on a Scavenging Ooze and thus saving your Dismember for an anticipated Tarmogoyf, or a more complicated idea, like casting Supreme Will instead of Condescend to counter a spell, missing the scry because you want good target for your Gearhulk, which is your next turn flash blocker for the Gurmag Angler currently beating on you.

## IDENTIFYING DECKS

Correctly identifying an opponent's deck is something that comes primarily with experience. In some cases it can be simple; a fetchland into Soul-Scar Mage is very likely Prowess, however playing a Scalding Tarn and not fetching could be anything from Temur Reclamation to Storm. You won't really know until they've cracked their land and played a few spells. Despite this, in most situations you can at least gain an idea of how the opponent's deck fits into the archetypes above. Cracking fetches for Ux lands and leaving them untapped is likely some sort of control deck or Uro pile, but could have a combo element as well in Through the Breach or Mystical Teachings, depending on the colours. Opening with scry lands and spells like Serum Visions is likely a deck trying to dig for an essential combo. Anything playing Thought Scour may well be fuelling a Delve spell or Delirium and so you're likely looking at a proactive midrange deck.

Identifying a deck into these archetypes, even before having perfect knowledge of the specific deck or variant your opponent is playing, is very useful to start helping you realise the cards in your deck that stand out as the most effective ways of stopping or stabilising, but also which cards are not so useful. This allows you to make better decisions when digging, which your deck will start doing very early on. Our deck sees a lot of cards, but part of that is having to temporarily reject some of our deck by either scrying cards to the bottom of our library or binning them to Thirst. These decisions are heavily influenced by knowledge of your opponent's strategy, and even against an unknown deck, being able to recognise characteristics of these archetypes can help make correct choices, which can have huge impacts on the later game.

## UTRON'S ARSENAL

The knowledge of your opponent's deck, or at least the classification of it into some archetype categories allows you to which aspects of the game will help determine the win, be it card advantage, walls of counters or removal, digging for threats or Tron, or just having a specific hate card like Chalice. We can then use this information to decide on a lower-level which cards are worth digging for and keeping, and which are good to pitch to Thirst or scry away.

UTron has a way of fighting on all types of fields. The insane flexibility of the deck can only be fully utilised by the pilot if they're experienced with their version of it and know how the cards behave in different situations. This section aims to provide a more contextual description of how best to use the different cards in the deck, with brief example scenarios.

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## COUNTERSPELLS, BOUNCE AND REMOVAL

Our counterspells, bounce and removal are the way we control threats one at a time. Chaining these against a proactive opponent is the primary method the deck gets ahead; slowing or stopping their strategy until we've dug into a stabiliser. Whilst we include a lot of interaction, the nature of the deck will require you to choose which threats to interact with as oppose to trying to keep your opponent's board completely clean. Correctly making these choices each game is drawn primarily from experience and knowledge of your opponent's deck, but there are some general guidelines if we consider that our deck wins by stopping threats, generating card advantage and playing stabilisers. With this strategy in mind, the most dangerous cards your opponent can play are:

**FAST THREATS** – things that are going to kill you before you can stabilise. Whilst all threats are a form of clock, some are clearly too strong or explosive for us to let hit us if we're looking to play a longer game. The decision for what comes under 'too fast' is dependent on how long you see the game going on. The expectation for a control matchup to play a very long game and interfere with our ability to stabilise means a simple Snapcaster Mage can present a worrying clock, as it forces us to play proactively to remove it. Against Grixis Shadow the same threat pales in comparison to Shadow and Angler, and won't have the time to kill us before we can reliably drop a Wurmcoil Engine, which they can't stop us casting pre-board and can't really beat.

**CARD ADVANTAGE GENERATORS** – cards that allow your opponent to keep drawing into gas and compete with Thirst for Knowledge. Generally this covers cards that keep generating whilst they're on the board like Dark Confidant or Jace, the Mind Sculptor, but also 2 for 1's like Command cards, and things that hurt our card quality like Thought-Knot Seer and Liliana of the Veil, although these are more scary as threats. These types of cards usually mean that the opponent can continue digging into gas and eventually we won't be able to stop them, however sometimes they can be less impactful if we get to a stabiliser their deck just can't beat. It doesn't matter how many cards Prowess draws pre-board if we have Chalice on 1 and Angel.

**KEY COMBO PIECES** – These cards are a fairly obvious choice since they usually win the game on the spot (Ad Nauseam, Scapeshift), however the trickier cards to evaluate are those that could be combo enablers. Cards like Garruk Wildspeaker in ToothandNail.dec isn't going to kill us very fast, but could allow the player to generate enough mana with Nykthos and Utopia Sprawls that we can't counter a Tooth and Nail next turn. On the other hand, Phyrexian Unlife is a card we can let sit about doing nothing, then either counter Ad Nauseam or Repeal the Unlife in response to them drawing their whole deck and casting Thassa's Oracle.

Choosing between types of interaction is also important. Our counterspells, removal and bounce spells all do slightly different things and are useful in different situations. The choice between what to use for various threats is very situational and quite complicated to work out, but for some general questions you should be asking yourself are:

- **How does your interaction line up against this threat?** Most of the time, cards that fall into the categories above are best dealt with by a Condescend they can't pay for. It's a hard counter that also digs us up to three cards deep. But there are situations where our other interaction can be better. If you only have the mana left up to Condescend a Koth of the Hammer on 1 against Skred, maybe a Remand is a better choice here, as they could have Simian Spirit Guide to pay the Condescend cost. Next turn you can hold up more mana to Condescend if they play it again, which they likely will. If their spell has incurred an additional cost, such as Eldritch Evolution or Collective Brutality, Remand is also useful to force them to pay the cost again and get some card advantage. This also applies to the idea that hard removal is usually favoured over bounce spells. Needing to deal with a 5/5 Urza token is something that can be done with Dismember, but a Repeal is much stronger here to not cost

life and also draw a card. Repeal is also better against cards that are inefficient to play from their hand but are free from the graveyard, like Bloodghast.

- **How is the interaction in your hand going to fare later on in the game?** If you have a fairly even choice between Condescend and Remand for the current threat, consider which you'd prefer to have in your hand going forward? They're casting a Liliana and have a big graveyard with a Lingering Souls in it? Condescend is probably better, since Remand is going to do well in the future against the flashbacked Souls and any Delve creatures they might play. As a wider example, the idea of choosing to delay spells with Remand or Repeal instead of hard removing them with Condescend or Spatial is strong if you're confident of landing an Ugin or OStone in a few turns, since you're only looking to buy time and prevent these cards from hurting you until they get eaten by your boardwipe, after which you're left with your hard counters and removal for further threats.
- **Does your interaction have the potential to be made redundant?** Some decks run cards that are resilient against different types of interaction. If you're against Humans and have a choice between countering a threat or letting it resolve for removal, the counterspell should probably be prioritised, as they could drop Cavern next turn and then you'll be happy you have the Dismember remaining and not the Condescend. On the other hand if you're facing Bogles and they tap out for Kor Spiritdancer, it's better to let it resolve and hit it with Spatial, since your removal is dead against anything else they play, whereas the Spell Burst you have is still useful.
- **Do you need to dig?** This is a core aspect of our strategy. Often your success rate will be correlated to the number of cards into your deck you dig each game, and this can mean playing suboptimal interaction for an early threat to make sure you hit land drops or to find a specific stabiliser. If you're stuck on 3 lands and have no Thirst, your choice between Dismembering a 3/4 Tarmogoyf and Repealing it EoT should often be Repeal. You can likely still remove the Goyf next turn, but right now Repeal digs you further into your deck to find that all important land. For similar reasons, sometimes it's better to let smaller threats resolve if it means you can freely dig at the end of your opponent's turn and vastly increase the quality or size of your hand. As an example of this, if you're on the back foot with only a Supreme Will left for interaction and your opponent has managed to commit threats to the board with a lot of mana, it's better to not counter the last thing they tap out for and instead dig for the chance of hitting the OStone, Ugin or Cyclonic Rift you have left. The likelihood is that countering that last threat won't slow them down sufficiently to let you naturally dig four cards deep, and letting it resolve means getting a more valuable boardwipe if you do find one.

Our interaction is the most important part of the deck, and knowing how to use it effectively comes primarily from knowledge of your opponent's deck and exactly how it wins. However, since we are such a reactive deck it's easy to sit behind your interaction for too long and fail to progress your own gameplan. There is a big difference between being 'far away from losing' and 'close to winning' the game, and your pattern of interaction should reflect a high-level idea of how you plan to stabilise and turn the game around. This plan may change throughout the game based on anything from incorrect assumptions of your opponent's deck, the specific cards they draw, what you draw and how long you see the game going on. Try and always be mindful of your best stabilisers, how reliably and quickly you can get them out, and how close you are to Tron and the tipping point where you have both card and mana advantage online. This lets you best line up your interaction with the opponent's strategy and delay them just long enough for you to create an insurmountable board state on your side, from which you can overwhelm the opponent and win the game.

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## STABILISERS, THREATS AND WINCONS

UTron's stabilisers are the payoff cards for running Tron. These are cards that aim to invalidate the opponent's strategy and immediately create a state where their board presence and spells are much less threatening than they were previously. In some cases, the stabilisation card can line up so perfectly against the opponent's deck that they can be cast without backup and without need to properly consider a subsequent game plan, since the stabiliser will either cause a concession immediately or single-handedly hold their threat suite off for the foreseeable future. In most cases however, if chosen well the stabiliser forms an enormous speed bump that the opponent has to commit both time and resources into removing to allow them to continue to threaten us. This time is something we can spend finding more stabilisers, getting to our inevitability or just using our interaction to prevent them dealing with our threat and closing the game out.

To be effective, it's important to dig or tutor for the right card to stabilise against the opponent's strategy. Treasure Mage and Karn allow us to tutor for most of our big artifacts, however cards like Ugin, Oblivion Stone and Cyclonic Rift need to be dug for to find. It is therefore useful for the stabilisers chosen for the deck to be flexible and able to turn games round against a wide variety of strategies. This is covered more specifically in [Matchups and Sideboarding](#), but each stabiliser is considered here with an explanation of their primary roles.

**KARN, THE GREAT CREATOR** is a card that drastically changes the way you build the deck. Included either not at all or as a 4-of, if used Karn allows you to play at a lower curve and drag your higher-CMC stabilisers in from the sideboard, minimising the potential for having dead 8-drops in your hand during the early and mid stages of the game without Tron. The scope of playable inclusions for the Karnboard is wide and a subject to both continuous debate and personal choice, therefore all that is provided here is this author's opinion of the essential, recommended and otherwise playable inclusions for new pilots building a Karnboard:

Essential:

- **Liquimetal Coating:** This is the baby brother of the banned Mycosynth Lattice, allowing us to turn lands into artifacts and then kill them with Karn's uptick. Once established this engine is hideously strong; destroying a land every turn whilst requiring no extra investment of resources or mana and growing Karn puts you at an enormous incremental advantage. Against some matchups this combo merits us mulliganning aggressively to Tron and Karn, to start taking them off lands by turn 3/4. Coating can also be used as a Pithing Needle in the opponent's upkeep to turn of planeswalkers, and allows us to use our removal on any permanent in conjunction with Karn's animation. Overall, Liquimetal is the most powerful thing you can be doing with Karn if you can't resolve a big stabiliser and have no relevant lock pieces to fetch.
- **Walking Ballista:** Having tutorable removal and direct damage is extremely useful. Walking Ballista needs no introduction and will likely only be omitted from the Karnboard if you are running 4 in the main.
- **Ensnaring Bridge:** This card isn't fair and just straight-up wins against some decks. We have to do more work than other Tron decks to get cards out of our hand to exploit this, however it's a completely reasonable play to cast Bridge and Condescend it on 0 twice just to dump cards out of your hand if the Bridge is going to prevent you from dying. A lot of decks just can't deal with this card, and we can win over the top of it.
- **Grafdigger's Cage/Relic of Progenitus/Tormod's Crypt:** Some form of graveyard hate is absolutely required in the Karnboard, even if you run Relics in the main. The specific card is up for player choice, however these are the usual options to choose between.
- **Sundering Titan:** If this isn't in the main, it's in the side. Sundering Titan is a staple of the deck in the current metagame and is an excellent threat to have 4 virtual copies of with Karn.

Recommended:

- **Chalice of the Void:** Other Tron decks either run all 4 Chalice in the main or not at all. Most UTron builds will run 1-3 in the main and so having another in the side to grab is extremely useful.
- **Wurmcoil Engine:** This card is usually in the main however it is correct to also include in the Karnboard, allowing Karn to provide the Treasure Mage role of absorbing damage and finding us our classic stabiliser.
- **Mindslaver:** As with Sundering Titan, there is an option to put this in the Karnboard to lower the CMC curve of your deck. In the very late game this allows Karn to provide an instant wincon with Academy Ruins.

Other Playable Inclusions:

- **Trinisphere:** This is more popular in decks that cannot run Chalice since it forms the same general role of preventing your opponent from chaining multiple cheap spells. Can be lights out for some decks but does hurt us slightly more than Chalice.
- **Oblivion Stone:** If this isn't played in the main it's an option to include here. The downside is that this will probably take your Karn with it, since if you're fetching this it's likely that you need to pop it as soon as you can. This will still win games by being in the Karnboard and is a worthwhile inclusion.
- **Witchbane Orb/Orbs of Warding:** Having hexproof is real good against Burn, and some combo decks just can't win while these effects are in play. Their downside is their high mana cost and relatively narrow utility, making them very meta-dependant.
- **Skysoverign, Consul Flagship:** This is a staple in the Eldrazi Tron builds as a fantastic tempo card. A play pattern of turn 2 Chalice, turn 3 TKS, turn 4 Karn into turn 5 Flagship is an incredible amount of pressure for your opponent to deal with. This card can be animated by Karn without the need to be crewed and shoots planeswalkers and threatening creatures while providing a strong clock. Whilst that's everything ETron wants to do, we have to consider that Flagship is far worse in the later game than many of our other stabilisers. If your UTron build is more aggressive with an Eldrazi Temple and the playset of TKS then this is a viable inclusion.
- **Crucible of Worlds:** As discussed in [Card Advantage and Utility](#), this is useful for both getting back your lands against land destruction, but also for pairing with Ghost Quarter to slowly eat your opponent's lands as they run out of basics. In decks utilising this engine, there's an option to have Crucibles in the Karnboard.
- **Torpor Orb:** This shuts down Primeval Titan and does well against Humans and Soulherder decks. It does stop a few of our own cards, namely Sundering Titan, Torrential Gearhulk and Snapcaster Mage, but this downside can be easily played around and Torpor Orb is a solid meta call.

There are many other choices that can be chosen based on your specific meta, however it is extremely important to remember that we are a control deck and we need sideboard space for actual sideboard cards. This primer would recommend limiting your Karnboard to a maximum of 8 cards, and an example of this is shown in the author's decklist in [Appendix 2: Further Reading](#).

Using Karn is not as straightforward as it initially seems. Whilst it is sometimes obvious to tick him down to find either a threat or a relevant lock piece, being left on 3 loyalty and subject to a Bolt or lethal attack is a realistic reason to sometimes tick Karn up on playing him. This is likely more preferable if Karn's static is relevant in the matchup, as Karn himself becomes better than any hate piece or wincon you could fetch, and being able to untap with interaction before downticking and weakening Karn is a viable strategy. The opposite of this is if Karn is very likely to get removed before you untap, and here is it correct to downtick to find either a relevant big stabiliser (Wurmcoil, Sundering) or a relevant prison piece like Bridge or Chalice. Since Karn is a pivotal card for the decks that run him, it is useful to examine how best to use him against various different archetypes of deck. For obvious reasons this is a very general analysis on how to use Karn and is completely subject to the specifics of the game.

- **Aggro:** Generally Karn is best ticked down to find Chalice, Bridge, Ballista or Wurmcoil, depending on the specific matchup. Here you are almost hoping to lose your Karn afterwards by having him soak up some combat damage or eat a Bolt. Better plays might ignore the Karn and allow you to tutor up another relevant artifact in favour of being more aggressive, but either way unless you have an artifact in play and need a blocker, you should be using Karn to find something that stems the damage.
- **Midrange:** If you have Tron, you find Sundering Titan. If you don't, you find Wurmcoil Engine. The best thing here is just that Karn will likely cost them a card to remove and this 2 for 1 will be relevant. If Karn survives then you get another card off him and the value train keeps going.
- **Control:** If you manage to resolve a Karn and do not have an opposing planeswalker you can animate an attacker into, the best target is Liquimetal Coating. The control deck will likely have a hard time removing Karn, and we should have the ability to force through a 2 mana artifact far more easily than an 8 mana Titan. If Coating resolves you can hold up interaction for the rest of the game whilst destroying their lands. Other good fetches are your graveyard hate to stop Uro, or Walking Ballista to kill planeswalkers.
- **Big Mana:** If you're up against Tron and land a fast Karn that is likely to stick, it's Liquimetal Coating. If you can play it that turn you can stop them in their upkeep to at least remove the text from a land before you start Sinkholing next turn. Primeval Titan decks are more soft to Ensnaring Bridge, Chalice on 0 or if they have Dryad of the Ilyrian Grove in play, Sundering Titan to destroy all their lands.
- **Combo:** If it's artifact combo, tick Karn up. Nothing in your sideboard suite is going to help more than the one-sided Stony Silence you just played. After you untap you can be a bit more reckless and start to find a way to win with interaction up but it is likely in these matchups that Karn's board presence alone swings the game in our favour. For other combo decks, a selection of Chalice, Bridge, Liquimetal providing a Pithing Needle role or Grafidigger's is sufficient to at least cause them to stumble.

Karn is undoubtedly a very powerful card, but notwithstanding the relevancy of his static ability he doesn't immediately affect the board. Care should be taken when tapping out for Karn that you are not going to allow your opponent to gain an insurmountable advantage in their next turn, whether that's enacting a combo, committing creatures to the board, knocking your life total down too low to recover or simply resolving something backbreaking like a T3feri. Karn is always a tempting play as soon as you have the mana for him, and is often correct to just jam onto an empty board to start pressuring your opponent, however its important to keep in mind that we are not good at providing continuous pressure on our opponent like Gx or Eldrazi Tron, and when playing Karn you should consider the potential for the state of play when you untap with him. That being said, Karn's incredible flexibility will usually mean that the card you fetch has the power to pull you very far ahead, and if cast with Tron and a blue source online is an exceptionally strong card to play with interaction still available. Overall, Karn is absurdly powerful and is often the best threat in our hand.

**WURMCOIL ENGINE** is our most versatile stabiliser, since it forms a big blocker, a threat, a life gain engine, removal for big creatures and a value machine if they try and remove it. All of this for the low cost of six mana! Wurmcoil is our answer to creature decks without excessive evasion or anything that wants to chip at our life total or grind out card advantage. It's also our strongest clock if we need to apply pressure. Against most of these decks, Wurm can simply be dropped without much thought and will often take over the game. Wurmcoil is also resilient to our boardwipes, allowing us to attack for a lifelinking 6 before blowing up an OStone and still be left with two decent

blockers. Wurmcoil's weak spots are anything that can remove it efficiently (the most flagrant offenders here being Path to Exile and planeswalkers), or creatures that somehow invalidate its keywords, like a big Bogle with first strike.

Wurmcoil Engine is rarely a pure wincon. Against some creature decks, it can be thrown down as early as possible and will immediately take over the game or force a concession. However, against most decks Wurmcoil is played as a gigantic speedbump that says to your opponent 'spend a few turns and 2-3 cards dealing with this, since you can't win whilst it's on the board'. While our opponent scrambles around for a bit answering Wurmcoil, we likely gain some life, trade Wurm and the tokens with some creatures, and run our opponent down on resources. All these things culminate to give us *time*. Mindslaver lock dictates that all our deck really needs to win is time. Wurmcoil is our main way of getting a few free turns and climb back into the game. By the time our opponent is threatening us again, we have likely found another stabiliser, interacted with their board enough to slow them down even further, got to Mindlock or even just used Ruins or Karn to bring the Wurm back for another go.

**SUNDERING TITAN** is a meta-dependant threat that is currently very strong. With the recent WOTC police of printing cards that are very good by themselves (T3feri, Uro, Field of the Dead, Mystic Sanctuary), and the banning of Arcum's Astrolabe, the Modern metagame has shown a fast rise in UGx control/midrange piles that use a fetch-shock manabase. Sundering Titan is tutorable with Karn and Treasure Mage, uncounterable by Force of Negation and is an absolute death sentence for these decks. Usually you can take them off a colour or two, prevent them recurring Uro and set them back 3 turns, all whilst presenting a 7/10 body that they can't remove without losing another three lands. A bonus here is that if the opponent is in blue, we don't even lose our own island. Sundering Titan is the best thing you can do against these greedy manabase decks, and should be your main priority for threat selection when tutoring with Karn or Treasure Mage. Some builds even run a Cavern of Souls in the side to allow you to mulligan aggressively to this card and force it through.

**PLATINUM ANGEL** is very matchup dependant. Sometimes she can win a game on the spot if our opponent has no removal for it, other times our opponent's win condition invalidates having Angel as a defence (Storm, Valakut). However, despite this variance she's still powerful and completely requires removal for your opponent to win. For this reason, there are two main lines of play with Angel once you exclude decks that just can't beat her anyway:

- Play Angel with a healthy life total and protect her with counterspells and Chalice until she beats them to death or you find another wincon,
- Play Angel as a last resort against a deck that's a turn away from killing you, and hope they don't get removal until you can stabilise properly or find some way of protecting her.

Even against decks whose removal lines up well against Angel, this strategy of 'protect the queen' is perfectly viable and can buy you enormous amounts of time. However, a key point to understand is that Angel won't improve your situation; she'll just prevent that situation from killing you whilst she lives. Angel does have the advantage over Wurmcoil of not needing to connect with something to save you (which is why she's a better 'last resort' tutor than Wurmo), but she won't let you climb back into a stable position by herself. You'll need to find something else if you want to get back into a position where you're not one resolved removal spell away from losing the game.

Overall, Wurmcoil is generally better if you have time and the lifelink is relevant, Angel is better if you're circling the drain and Wurmcoil won't save you, or you can protect her and a 4/4 flyer is a decent threat for that matchup. Angel is boarded out against decks that have multiple different ways of getting her off the board.

**UGIN, THE SPIRIT DRAGON** is a card that owns any board he lands on. It will be very difficult for your opponent to establish any kind of board presence whilst Ugin lives (unless they're playing with colourless things). The usual line with Ugin is to cast him, -X to clear away anything dangerous and then tick up against any remaining threats or go to

face. The combination of these two abilities is what allows Ugin to single-handedly completely control the board, deterring your opponent from committing any more threats whilst forming a clock in the form of direct damage or growing towards his game-winning ultimate. Ugin's -10 is obscenely powerful; stabilising us with some lifegain and letting us dump our hand +7 new cards onto the field. Sometimes this finds you a free Mindslaver lock which just wins, but most of the time just lets you put down a Wurmcoil or two, a bunch of lands, and maybe a few ETB triggers like Gearhulk or Treasure Mage, digging you into even more gas. It's enormously difficult to lose after Ugin has ultimated, and most opponents just concede.

Choosing to tick Ugin up or down when he is cast can be tricky. Usually, the choice is obvious; if Ugin comes down against multiple threats then you should -X for whatever is needed to reset the board. However, landing an earlier Ugin vs two smaller threats (Scavenging Ooze and Dark Confidant for example) could mean it's better to shoot the Confidant for 3 and race Ugin ticking up against the Scooze. If they attack Ugin, you're not taking damage and Scooze likely dies next turn. If they attack you, Ugin keeps his higher loyalty. Even if they attack Ugin *and* play something that requires Ugin to -X next turn (like a Liliana), he ends up with more loyalty than he would have if he'd wiped twice, and everything's still dead. Now you have an Ugin that's out of bolt range and about to tick up again next turn.

Ugin's power over the board cannot be overstated, however not all decks fight in that way. Ugin is not as strong against decks that are trying to win with spells in their hand, most notably control and spell-combo decks (Ad Nauseam, Through the Breach, UGx Control, Storm). Against these, Ugin only forms a two-turn clock to his ultimate, and that usually isn't worth tapping 8 mana if we hamper our ability to play counterspells on the following turn. This draws from the idea explained in [Threats and Stabilisers](#); big colourless cards that provide nothing but a threat in that matchup are not worth tapping out for. Ugin is still a good card, since sometimes these decks need a few cards on the field for their combo to go through (Storm needs Baral/Electromancer, Ad Nauseam can need Phyrexian Unlife) and Ugin still has some stabilisation role to play by delaying these decks.

**MINDSLAVER** is our top-end wincon. This card, combined with Academy Ruins, is our way of punishing opponents that let us drag the game on too long. To explain the package, Mindslaver with Academy Ruins and 11U worth of other mana allows us to play and pop Slaver, take our opponent's turn, then at the end of their turn activate Ruins to put Slaver on top of our library, draw it, and do the same thing again. Essentially we take over all of our opponent's turns. The wincon is usually to mill them out, since we draw Slaver every turn so our deck doesn't get any smaller whilst theirs does, however you can also try and use their deck to kill them to save on time. This strategy allows our deck to beats things life infinite life, which opponents may not be aware of when they use these strategies and claim they have won.



When Mindlocking a player, you want to spend their turn tapping them out and ensuring they can't stop the lock, which there are very few ways to do once it's started (watch out for Force of Negation). In some cases, it is correct to try and kill the opponent with their own deck if you think you can, or stop locking once you've run them completely out of resources to try for a quicker kill from threats you might still have in your hand. These ideas are used to save time if the opponent is making you play the lock out, instead of conceding as most people do.

Mindslaver is also very useful as a card even without the lock, as a lot of decks can be completely crippled by controlling them for a turn. You get to attack their creatures into yours if you have them, waste their spells and removal and generally run them out of a lot of resources. Sometimes you can just win the game on the spot. Examples of this include:

- Blasting through all of Infect's pump spells then not attacking, leaving them with nothing,
- Killing a Storm player with their own deck,
- Ultimating a Liliana on the Jund player and choosing for them to put everything in one pile, then sacrifice it,
- Playing a Ravager and sacrificing a Hardened Scales player's entire board to it, including Glimmervoid,
- Surprise Slaver a player after they've played a Pact spell and choose not to pay the upkeep cost,
- Using GxTron's hand and board to exile their own Tronlands and threats, crippling their game,
- Casting Scapeshift and sacrificing all their lands to it, then either killing them or failing to find anything,
- Casting Spoils of the Vault naming Black Lotus/Storm Crow/Splinter Twin/Charizard.

Optimally using Mindslaver on an opponent is extremely difficult, especially against decks with a high spell to creature ratio. The best advice to take on board is to take the time fully establishing your line of play. It's easy to get excited and play suboptimally by flying through the first obvious steps of Slavering someone (Push their creature, Thoughtseize themselves) and not looking ahead because oh whoops you needed that Maelstrom Pulse the Thoughtseize took to deal with their Liliana. Make sure you establish your line to its entirety, including other lines you're considering, before making actual plays. Some ideas to consider:

- Try and play a Tutor to look at their deck. Fetchlands are a good way of doing this and it gives valuable information about what variant they're playing, what you might still have to deal with and any sideboard choices they might have made. Plus you get to waste the Tutor by failing to find.
- Keep referencing your hand. If you have a Wurmcoil in hand and a choice between wasting a kill spell on their only creature or a scry spell that might let you put lands on top of their deck, the scry spell is probably the better choice, as your Wurmo can hold their board off and is probably too big for their removal to matter. They might have some cards you can counter and some you can't. Try and get rid of whatever you'll struggle to deal with when they get control back. Remember you can run their spells into Condescend on 0 and choose for them not to pay.
- Think about your follow-up play. Remember you get another turn straight after this. Do you have anything meaningful to do after Slaver? You might be able to clinch a win against Death's Shadow by making their creatures attack you down to 1 life if that opens a door for your Gearhulk with Spatial cast on it to finish them off. You might have nothing and so just need to slow them down as much as you can. Try and think about the cards they have that stop you stabilising most effectively, and any cards you can use against them for free 2-for-1s.
- Holding back on casting Chalice of the Void until after you've Slavered a player can be backbreaking if you play their hand in a way that allows you to untap and just nullify the remaining cards in their hand.
- Tap them out at the end of their turn. You get a free turn of resolving anything you like.

The last thing to consider in Mindslaver turns is that the card gives you control over ‘target player during that player’s next turn’. You control the player, and they play their spells. Some opponents may be quite happy to just give you their hand and watch, but some may not want you to grab their expensive cards and start throwing them around the table whilst laughing inanely. Always be polite, and it’s a good idea to phrase plays in the form of instructions to that player, for example ‘tap Overgrown Tomb to cast Fatal Push targeting your Tarmogoyf’, not ‘I’ll kill this with that’. Manners and clarity go a long way into avoiding hostility and judge calls during one of the more complicated modes of Magic gameplay.

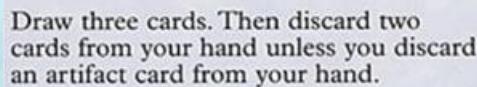
Overall, Mindslaver is incredibly powerful and one of the most demoralising things you can do to your opponent. It’s also part of your wincon. For this reason, it is included in pretty much every build.

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### CARD ADVANTAGE AND VALUE

This section gives further discussion about our card advantage and value engines. These cards are how we pull ahead in the mid and endgames, by ensuring we always have more answers than the opponent has threats, and allowing us to dig into our finishers. Although this part of the deck has a lot of room for personal variety, here only the most essential and most common cards will be discussed, with the aim of both explaining these inclusions and giving pilots a good understanding of the objective of this part of the deck when evaluating their own choices.

The main card advantage we have in UTron is an absurdly powerful, three mana instant that reads:



Draw three cards. Then discard two cards from your hand unless you discard an artifact card from your hand.

**THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE** was restricted in Vintage for a time. It only takes a few tries with the deck to appreciate how obscene this card really is, but on the face of it, the reasons for it being a permanent 4-of staple are:

- It says ‘draw three cards’,
- Its instant speed,
- We have a large number of artifacts in our deck that we can pitch to this, most of which we can get back with Academy Ruins,
- The cards you discard don’t have to be from the ones you’ve drawn; this card can completely transform a bad hand,
- It only costs one blue source,
- *It says ‘draw three cards’.*

Thirst is the best nonland card in the deck. It is our primary way of both generating card advantage and digging through our library. Thirst is best cast at the end of your opponent’s turn if you have the spare mana, but can be cast main phase and even chained in multiples if you have Tron and enough blue sources. If you manage to discard an artifact (which you should be aiming for unless you have lots of other dead cards) Thirst nets you strict card advantage along with the virtual advantage of improved hand quality.

The inclusion of Thirst also drives home the importance of our deck's artifact count. In Legacy card evaluation, if a card is blue, it gains a deckbuilding advantage simply because it can be pitched to Force of Will, the defining card of the format. The defining card of our deck is Thirst, and so any artifacts we consider gain a similar bonus when being evaluated. This is part of the reason our threat suite is mostly artifacts, and why we can run seemingly odd one-offs like Solemn Simulacrum and Mazemind Tome as well as multiples of Chalice and Talismans. These have the potential to be dead cards by themselves, but can provide us with indirect card advantage by being available to pitch to Thirst.

Never board Thirst for Knowledge out. Never run less than 4. It's our best nonland card and it wins us games we have no right winning.

The rest of the cards that gain us card advantage are less direct than Thirst, and are dependent on the matchup. Cards like Solemn and Wurmcoil are card advantage against 'fair' decks like Jund and Abzan, as they gain value when they trade with creatures or are removed. Academy Ruins recurring Wurmcoil every turn often causes a concede, since playing aggressively with the big Wurm forces them to kill it, letting you bring it back and get an ever growing supply of little Wurms. Fair decks just can't deal with this level of continuous gas.

In a non-Karn deck, the two Mages are straight card advantage. Treasure and Trinket Mage give us both a blocker (or threat, if it's a control matchup) on the board, and replace themselves with a big artifact in our hand. If these cards somehow manage to trade with a relevant attacker (Dark Confidant, Meddling Mage, Goblin Guide) then we gain a strict 2 for 1, but even just chumping with the Mages is fine to buy us time towards the threat they found. As an example, sometimes a great line against creature decks is Treasure Mage (finding Wurmcoil), chump block into Solemn (get an Island), then chump block into Wurmcoil. To explain fully, here we spent two cards (Treasure Mage and Solemn), got *three* cards back (Wurmcoil, Island and Solemn redraw), ramped for a turn 5 Wurmcoil and bought two turn's worth of life with the chump blocks. All of this from just two cards and without requiring Tron. If we managed to play a Chalice on 1 before the turn three Treasure Mage, we're in an even better position of having a more secure Wurmcoil. This line is a good way to play when faced with cards that stop our usual interaction, like Cavern of Souls or Thalia, Guardian of Thraben.

The rest of our value and card advantage/quality comes from our interactive spells cantripping or digging. The staples of Condescend, Repeal and Remand all dig you a couple of cards deep and are card neutral, which is why they're the core of our deck's engine. Rejected cards like Unsubstantiate and Vapor Snag both fail to dig and are card disadvantage, so (despite their attractive mana costs) cannot be included. We're a slow control deck, not a quick tempo deck, and we need to dig through our library for continued answers to whatever we're facing.

**CHALICE OF THE VOID** is one of the deck's greatest assets. This card is very often a virtual X-for-1, blanking a good number of very relevant cheap cards that our opponents have versus very few of ours given our wide CMC curve. Chalice is usually played on 1, hitting only our four Expedition Maps, which are usually played most usefully on turn 1 before Chalice hits the field. Too contrast this extremely minor drawback with the advantage Chalice gives us, it is worth showing the effect of the card on a number of decks in the format, with the recommended number of charge counters shown in brackets. In a usual game 1, Chalice:

- Straight up wins unless they're specifically ready for it:
  - o Infect (1), if you can counter Become Immense which we can,
  - o Living End (0),
  - o Storm (2),
  - o Bogles (1), if it's early enough,

- Is very strong, usually requires removal for the opponent to continue their game plan:
  - o Death Shadow (1),
  - o Burn (2),
  - o Gx Tron (1), unless they're already there,
  - o Prowess (1),
  - o Pyromancer Ascension.dec (1),
  - o Lantern (1), unless they're already there,
  - o 8Rack (1),
  - o Jeskai Ascendancy (1),
  - o Amulet Titan (1), if you can Repeal Amulet of Vigor,
- Blanks a good number of their cards and creates dead draws:
  - o Through the Breach.dec (1)
  - o Burn (1),
  - o Ad Nauseam (0),
  - o Storm (1),
  - o Neobrand (0), postboard
  - o Lantern (1), if they're already there,
  - o Amulet Titan (0),
  - o Blue Moon (1),
  - o Whirza (1), if more midrange
  - o Whirza (0 or 2), if more combo
- Blanks more cards than our 4 maps, but most likely sided out game 2/3:
  - o Jund (1),
  - o Abzan (1),
  - o Death and Taxes (1),
  - o Ponza (1),
- Is bad, either due to a wide range of CMC, the opponent also playing Chalice, or 'can't be countered' effects:
  - o Tribal decks running Aether Vial and Cavern of Souls (Humans, Eldrazi, Merfolk),
  - o Uro piles,
  - o Eldrazi Tron,
  - o Mono U Tron,
  - o Mono Red Prison,
  - o Dredge,
  - o Scapeshift (unless you manage to put it on 4).

As can be seen, Chalice is often more useful than not, which is why it deserves a mainboard slot. Chalice also has a protection role to play, primarily found with blanking Path to Exile to allow Wurmcoil Engine to rampage over White decks, and stopping things like Pact of Negation in combo decks (Ad Nauseam, Titan). Chalice is a very strong card and forms a decent chunk of our 'anti-aggro' plan, but tied to its strength is knowledge of which number to play it on given your matchup.

Our other prison cards are mostly sideboard cards, which are explained better in [Matchups and Sideboarding](#), or Karnboard cards.

**THOUGHT-KNOT SEER** allows us to play a more proactive gameplan but often being cast on turn three after a Talisman. Generally, this card is good if it's the biggest creature on the board, but also allows us to rip their interaction out of their hand and clear the way for landing other threats and is especially good against Force of Negation. TKS can also be used aggressively to strip their removal out from their hand and then just beat down for 4 damage each turn whilst your interaction fights over them stopping it. This card in particular is backbreaking in multiples. Just watch out for Blood Moon.

**EXPEDITION MAP** is a card that deserves special mention. This is our third 4-of, and is only really boarded out against Death and Taxes decks. Much as we can play our game perfectly well without Tron, having access to a low investment, artifact, EoT tutor for our Tronlands and utility lands is our main way of ensuring our late game is as strong as it should be. Expedition Map is your best and often only option for a turn 1 play, and it gives you the benefit of having something very relevant to do with your mana at the end of your opponent's turn if they didn't play anything that required our interaction. If you have a lot of time in the early turns (against control, for example), then Map has the additional advantage of being recurable with Ruins to find all three Tronlands. The first activation finds the Ruins, then we can use the end of our opponent's turn to alternately crack Map and activate Ruins, slowly tutoring into Tron whilst keeping our interaction live in their turn. This exemplifies our gameplan; protecting ourselves whilst building up our advantage in the background, ready to start taking over the game. There is worth in delaying your Map activation until you draw the second Tronland, since before cracking you have 8 draws to get to Tron, whereas after cracking you limit yourself to 4, however this is often overshadowed by the more fundamental principle of ensuring you use your mana most effectively each turn.

**ACADEMY RUINS** is the best land in our deck after Island. Obviously the primary role of this card is for Mindslaver lock, and as this has been discussed in [Stabilisers, Threats and Wincons](#), this paragraph will briefly showcase a few other uses for this incredible land:

- OStone lock; getting Oblivion Stone back and playing it every turn to deny your opponent a board until it doesn't matter what they play. This is often a complete victory against most permanent decks, and will very likely cause a concession. This strategy is only weak to manlands, since they won't be hit by the OStone, and does also force you to eventually stop the lock to draw yourself into a way to actually win the game. The good news is you can restart the lock at any time if you don't draw well initially.
- As mentioned earlier, if you're sure of a slow game you can get Ruins with your first Map activation with the aim of recurring the Map over and over to get to Tron.
- Getting back Walking Ballista every turn and shooting your opponent with it for repeatable damage. Similar to OStone lock but better against a threat-clear board, this is a way to win against Ensnaring Bridge or other prison decks that may have found a way to stop you Mindlocking.
- As mentioned earlier, you can play very aggressively with Wurmcoil Engine to force your opponent to kill it, then recur it with Ruins and repeat, giving you a growing supply of Wurm tokens. This is usually a complete win against fair decks.

Overall, Ruins is a very strong card that often attracts removal over our Tronlands. For this reason it is usually correct to hold Ruins in your hand over other land drops, keeping it safe from removal until it can start doing its job. It is never correct to board Ruins out.

## KEY THREATS

This section aims to describe two types of cards; cards that are strong against our deck, and cards that opponents think are strong against our deck, but aren't. This aims to help players with their decisions in game, by giving a few notable examples of cards can be left to resolve and dealt with later, and some cards have to be removed right now or risk the game going downhill fast.

### PROBLEMATIC CARDS

The cards listed here are from a variety of decks, but are special in that they give the opponent a huge advantage, will quickly take over the game, or just straight up blank our strategy of stopping them. This isn't an exhaustive list, but the cards showcased here should serve to inform the types of strategies and cards we have trouble dealing with. For this section, it is assumed that these cards have resolved, since repeatedly adding 'but try and counter this' serves little purpose.

#### TEFERI, TIME RAVELER

This card is the single worst designed card ever introduced into the game. Banned in several formats and widely despised in the formats in which he remains legal, T3feri has been ruining control matchups and obnoxiously forcing through combos since his creation and continues to destroy meaningful gameplay and interaction on any board he hits. To explain for those unaware, T3feri's static ability removes the use of the stack, but only for one player. This turns the game into Magic vs Hearthstone and has a number of effects that aren't immediately realised upon facing the card:

- Your counterspells have no text on them whatsoever,
- All your opponent's spells are uncounterable,
- You cannot back up resolving your threats with interaction,
- Various random cards like Bloodbraid Elf, Torrential Gearhulk and Suspend cards no longer work,
- Spell Queller's return ability doesn't work – the spell is just exiled forever.
- Delay reads: 1U: Exile Target Spell.
- ....*the list goes on.*

There are far more nightmarish/unintuitive effects this card's static has, and wrapping it up on a cantripping, three mana planeswalker that bounces anything that could threaten it and is also a Leyline of Anticipation results in a card that is obnoxious to the point of being a straight-up design mistake. However, until it eats the inevitable banhammer, Modern players are here to suffer.

T3feri has the ability to completely shut off half of our deck just by existing and is a card type we typically have trouble dealing with. Against any deck that looks to be reactive in Azorius colours this card should be top of your list of considerations at all stages of the game. If it resolves and we aren't about to do something stupid with Tron the game swings obscenely far in our opponent's favour and our gameplan resorts to 'play cards at sorcery speed and

hope they stick', which our deck is not very well equipped to do and the opponent's deck is likely very well equipped to handle. If the opponent's deck is playing T3feri to freely combo off the following turn, your only hope is to have already played a Walking Ballista or be about to win.

Our best strategy against a resolved T3feri that we cannot immediately remove is to abandon the interactive side of our deck and focus on completing Tron and repeatedly hammering down threats. If we are able to do this it is likely T3feri will fall into irrelevancy and we can push through the win. In short, T3feri is bad against Gx and Eldrazi Tron, and therefore if he resolves we need to use our deck to best imitate either of those, since our deck's interactive USP doesn't exist any more. Failing that, another strategy is to follow this author's example of complaining about the card on Reddit until they ban it.

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### VEIL OF SUMMER

Also banned in multiple formats, Veil quickly gained deserved infamy under the tagline 'why does green get a one-mana Cryptic Command?' An unintuitive card at best and an egregious hoser at worst, this card hits a lot of our interaction and will very frequently lose you games by being a cantripping one mana counterspell. Thankfully this is stopped by Chalice on 1, but against any green deck that cares about interaction you should be very careful about them having untapped green sources when trying to resolve any of our blue or black cards. Remember to fight it whilst it's on the stack, as once it's resolved none of your interaction does anything for the rest of the turn. Spatial Contortion and Ugin/Ostione/Ballista do all get past it though.

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### CAVERN OF SOULS

Cavern is the king of cards that do powerful things with no drawback. Fixes colours, enters untapped, makes all your creatures uncounterable and can even be used to pay for noncreature spells; Cavern of Souls has nothing in the way of disadvantage apart from forcing you to lock into a specific, usually already strong, tribe. Our main issue with Cavern is clearly the uncounterable clause, immediately blanking a great deal of the most important part of our deck and often resulting in us having to change game plan completely to try and rush a stabiliser down.

When you see a Cavern, make note of the named creature type. This tells you a lot about the type of attack you'll be facing and lets you reevaluate your hand based on both the tribe you're dealing with and the presence of Cavern. From here on, your plan will normally change into one of three ideas:

- Remove Cavern as quickly as you can to try and make your counterspells relevant again,
- Ignore Cavern and use other types of permission to control the game as best you can whilst using your counters to dig (usually this is the case if you have few or no counters in your hand anyway),
- Rush to a threat or Tron and try and stabilise before they can kill you.

Choosing between these strategies (and others) is completely dependent on your build, your sideboard choices, the deck you're facing and most importantly how many still relevant cards you now have in your hand given the presence of Cavern. You may have a hand full of good removal for Humans and that could buy you time to land an Ugin, or you could have a Platinum Angel and Tron vs Eldrazi so can play that and use your counters to protect it from spells Cavern can't force through. You might have a Field of Ruin ready to crack on Cavern and continue right

away with countering creatures. Despite these all being realistic and viable ways to manage Cavern, it's no secret that the card can just completely wreck our day.

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#### AETHER VIAL

Aether Vial is in this section for similar reasons to Cavern; it makes spells uncounterable. It also has the benefit of allowing the Vial player to 'play' two creatures a turn, or Vial in cards at instant speed for both combat tricks and blink effect shenanigans.

Despite Vial's obvious benefits against us, it's less scary than Cavern. Firstly, it's a terrible card in the late game, as it has to build counters on it to be useful. For this reason, our bounce effects (Repeal being the best) are a good way of making this card largely redundant. Vial also has the strange effect of being worse the more of them you have, since you can only bring in creatures if you have them in your hand to begin with, which you won't have if your hand is full of Vials. A Taxes player showing us three Vials is usually not such scary news, since that's three less Thalias, Arbiters or Thought-Knot Seers they could have had.

Vial is a tricky card to play around. Chalice on 1 isn't quick enough unless you also have Repeal (but then it's great), and bringing in Needle effects just to name Vial is often quite a narrow solution, potentially leaving you with a dead card in hand if they don't have Vial. Our main solution to this card is just to play Karn TGC, but aside from this, the best way of dealing with Vial is just to be mindful what could be coming in each turn, and play in a way that minimises the impact of these cards. This is much easier said than done, but doing things like tapping the last of your mana to crack Maps EoT and opening yourself up to a Vial'd in Arbiter you can't pay for is lazy play. As above, the good thing about Vial is that eventually they'll be topdecking for creatures, and then Vial gets a lot worse, so if you can minimise its impact for a few turns you should be ok.

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#### THALIA, GUARDIAN OF THRABEN

This card is bad news for us. She comes down early and stops us playing our blue spells effectively. As mentioned previously, our early turns are the most crucial and we need to be able to get our interaction under the first few turns' worth of threats so we're not on the back foot. Thalia essentially forces us to play with one less land. If we're on the play, we're now on the draw. If we're on the draw, we're in serious trouble.

The best thing to do against Thalia is to use removal to get her off the board as fast as possible. Dismember is the best here, as it only costs us 1 mana, letting us play it turn 2 and not get completely out-tempoed. If you can hit her with a counterspell, use Condescend and Supreme Will over Remand; we want Thalia gone for good.

The second strategy against Thalia is just to try and make her ability redundant by playing lines that only use creatures. Curving Treasure Mage into Solemn Simulacrum, Thought-Knot Seer into Wurmcoil or Gearhulk is a great way of getting a threat down and still having good blockers, all whilst maintaining card advantage and rendering Thalia's tax useless. Walking Ballista exemplifies this idea and is an excellent answer to the card, as Thalia's tax doesn't stop us casting it on turn 2 and even then it can just be used as a removal spell to unlock your interaction again. Another option, as always, is to just have a fast way to complete Tron, after which the Thalia tax is easily paid for and a 2/1 body is irrelevant.

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### THOUGHTSEIZE

One mana targeted discard is a staple of many, many decks in Modern. So much so that even the land they've played T1 can't always tell you which deck you're up against. It could be midrange, like Jund or Rock, it could be Sultai, 8Rack, Whirza, could be Shadow or Taxes. Either way, Thoughtseize effects are quite good against us, but can be devastating if they come in multiples very early on. Simply put, we need spells in our hand to win, and having three discard effects go off by turn 2 turns the game into a tough affair by often leaving us with just lands and one irrelevant spell. Even if your opponent only has one threat after they've burnt through their discard, that's usually enough once they've taken all of your answers. Chalice on 1 is a great way to provide insurance against last game discard, but this is usually way too late for the initial barrage.

Discard can't really be played around, however, the more discard your opponent hits you with, the less they have in the way of actual threats to stop. Best hope we topdeck well or they're not smart enough to take Thirst. If you're facing a discard-heavy deck, be really careful about mulligans and about keeping land-heavy hands. Don't do their job for them.

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### JACE, THE MIND SCULPTOR

Jace has a staggering range of very good abilities that let him both control the board, improve and grow its owner's hand and ruin its opponent's draws, all whilst presenting a clock. Since his release into Modern he's become a staple of UGx control decks that have cards like Ice-fang Coatl and Force of Negation to protect him. We, unfortunately, can't reliably protect Jace as well, and when combined with him costing double blue early on in the game, this means he just doesn't fit well into our deck.

Jace is good against us for two main reasons – he allows the opponent to both draw an extra card every turn and maintain a good quality hand – and his bounce mode is very good against our single creature stabilisers like Wurmcoil and Angel. We aren't so fussed about the fateseal since we have enough tutors and card draw to make it comparatively weak, but even that gives Jace two more loyalty counters, which is fairly absurd given the minute costs of his other abilities.

Since Jace is so powerful in long games, and since we can't really play him and so many other control decks can, he often becomes a pivotal card in control matchups. Where previously we had both superior mana advantage and card advantage through Tron and Thirst in the endgame, with the printing of T3feri, Field of Ruin, Uro and the release of Jace, these decks can deny us our mana advantage and compete with us on the card advantage front. For this reason, we really need to stop Jace landing, or have a very strong counterplay on our side (Ugin, OStone, Slaver activation) ready to punish the opponent for tapping out. We also have Pithing Needle effects to bring out of the board to fight Jace, and usually these can hit a number of other cards in the decks that run him. Luckily for us, Jace is 4 mana, so we're well placed to counter him if you're not reckless about tapping out.

## CARDS YOU CAN IGNORE

This section describes cards that opponents unfamiliar with UTron think are good against us, but are not. These players will bring these cards in from their sideboards, and this section will explain why you can largely just let them resolve and deal with them later.

### BLOOD MOON

The original and most iconic way to shut off unfair lands and greedy manabases, Blood Moon is played all over Modern and is the normal answer to Tron decks. Against GxTron, Blood Moon does what it says on the tin and forces them to remove it or pay the fair cost for their big threats. If the Blood Moon player can apply sufficient pressure before the Tron player gets to 6/7 lands, they'll win. This strategy is usually successful and Blood Moon's utility against greedy manabases like Shadow, UGx and Humans often put it in the forefront of players' minds when sideboarding against anything running scary lands. This is excellent news for us.

People will board in and slam Blood Moon against you with the same vigour that they would against GxTron, thinking that they've gained a great advantage now it's resolved. And it's very true, this card turns our Tronlands, Academy Ruins and other utility lands into basic Mountains until it's removed. However, we have two reasons why we rarely care about Blood Moon, and one reason we sometimes love to see it played:

- We run 6-10 basic Islands. We can still easily play blue cards through Blood Moon.
- We don't need Tron to win, by any stretch. Wurmcoil is only 6 mana, even if that mana is red.
- If the opponent has played Blood Moon, *they haven't played a threat that could have done us damage.*

These points are summed up by saying that Blood Moon doesn't stop our deck doing what it does (because we are not a Tron deck), and because Blood Moon can't kill us. It's not a Goblin Rabblemaster, a Chandra, or a Bedlam Reveler, or any other actual threat we would have needed interaction to stop. Coupled with the fact that we have a number of decent ways to remove it later on in the game, this means that Blood Moon is often a three mana do-nothing spell that has the added bonus of shutting off your opponent's manlands. We just enjoy the fact that the opponent has essentially skipped their third turn, maybe get a Thirst for Knowledge in, continue playing a control game then either win by hardcasting threats or bouncing the Moon at a later stage to turn our lands on again.

There are occasions where Blood Moon is dangerous or worth countering. If you have Island, Mine and Tower in play, Condescend, Power Plant and Ugin in hand then it's usually completely correct to counter the Moon and slam Ugin whilst they're tapped out next turn. Blood Moon is also worth stopping if your only blue source isn't a basic Island, like Oboro, Tolaria West or River of Tears, because if you let Blood Moon resolve you're going to be completely stuck until you find an Island, Map or Oblivion Stone.

The last thing to consider with Blood Moon is that whilst it doesn't shut our Islands off, it will shut off cards like Spatial, Thought-Knot Seer and Warping Wail, since we can't pay the colourless mana costs. It is not even slightly worth running a Wastes to try and mitigate a fringe problem like this. If you suspect Blood Moon, shift Spatial into the sideboard for Dismember mainboard.

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### ALPINE MOON

A more recent addition, this was probably released in response to the complaint that Blood Moon on the draw wasn't quick enough to stop Tron. While this can still be Nature's Claimed, this card is reasonably good against GxTron, which is great for us for the same reason as Blood Moon; people think we're a Tron deck.

People playing this against us should name Academy Ruins or Blast Zone. Whilst that's a far better use of this card than naming Tower, this is still something we really don't care about, for the same reasons as Blood Moon. We can remove it, Repeal it and trap it behind a Chalice, or just ignore it, and it's one more card in their hand that wasn't a threat. This card has the added bonus of giving us another blue source and some other colours for EE and phyrexian black cards, as oppose to useless red mana from Blood Moon.

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### STONY SILENCE

Stony Silence is a heavily-played sideboard card that does well against GxTron by shutting off Maps, Stars, Spheres and OStones - usually about 15 cards. As with Blood Moon, opponents will bring this in against you and assume it's just as good. Against our deck, however, this shut off 4 Maps, OStone, Slaver, and Ballista – 7 cards, making it literally less than half as good. Sometimes it has the added bonus of shutting down opponent's cards too, like Aether Vial in Death and Taxes.

As with Blood Moon, depending on your hand and your plan for the game, you can usually ignore this and bounce it later on, if and when it becomes a problem. Stony's biggest crime against our deck is shutting off Mindslaver, Karn targets and Oblivion Stone, and with it our inevitability and best boardwipe. Thankfully, we have many ways of winning games without these cards, and Stony Silence doesn't stop our key idea of using blue spells to control what our opponent is doing. As with Moon, it's also a turn 2 play that isn't a threat; a Taxes player tapping for this over Thalia on turn 2 on the play has thrown us an enormous lifeline.

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### DAMPING SPHERE

Damping Sphere is included here for the same reason as the Moons; it's a way of turning off Tron that really isn't very effective against us, and isn't a scary early threat. The second ability however, is very much worth consideration when playing. This hampers our ability to play counterspells and Thirst at the end of our opponent's turn, and also makes things like Snapcaster and Gearhulk more awkward.

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### FIELD OF RUIN

If people are wasting time and mana to try killing our Urza lands because they believe we can't function without Tron, then we gain more time to play Thirsts and sculpt our hand to win the game with Islands because the opponent isn't playing as aggressively. We have ample supply of basics to fetch up, ensuring we never actually go down a land, and we can just continue making land drops until we get to our stabilisers. Against control decks these cards are more annoying, but hopefully the game should go on long enough to allow you to find Tron again and lever your mana advantage to victory.

## EXAMPLE HANDS

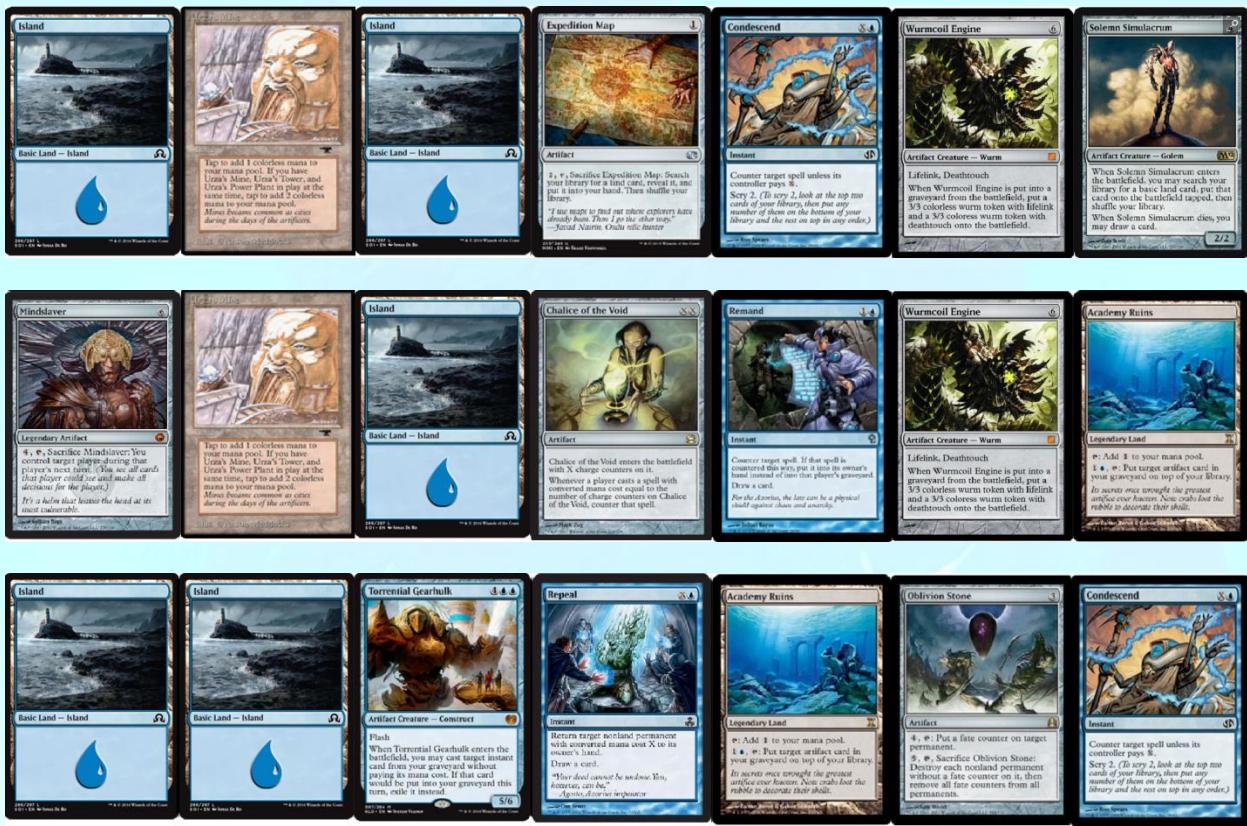
This section will discuss a range of example hands, and explain the concepts that determine the strength and keepability of different opening sevens. The decision to mulligan is heavily dependent on the deck you're facing; control decks make land heavy hands more acceptable, whereas aggro decks require quick interaction or Chalices. Discard decks generally force you to have a very good reason to mulligan and give them a 'free' discard, and combo decks mean you want to see counterspells forever. This section won't cover obvious cases, since the decision to mulligan a 0-lander doesn't require much in the way of explanation.

## GODHANDS



These are the most absurd starters we can have. These hands have a blue source, are close to or at Tron, have early game interaction, and have a good stabiliser or a way to dig for one. All of these hands can start controlling the game from turn 2, whilst digging and using the imminent completion of Tron to quickly arrive at a point where we can play stabilisers and hold up countermagic in the same turn. From here we can either push through for a win with the threat, or hold the game long enough to arrive at Mindslaver lock. There is not much else to be said for these hands, other than them nearly always being a keep.

KEEPABLE HANDS



These are a few examples of hands that are good, but not great. These hands have a good number of lands, including a blue source, have some interaction, some utility or threats, but crucially are missing a Thirst for Knowledge, easy Tron, or more than one counterspell. These are the hands that need to have more interactive cards on the top of the deck to continue our game plan, and will require you to be very careful about which of your opponent's plays you need to stop. To take these examples one by one:

- 1) This hand is the best of the three here. We have a turn one play, are reasonably close to Tron, and have our best counterspell. Condescend is the best card in this hand and will hopefully dig us into more good cards. Solemn is also nice here to try and ramp into a hardcast Wurmcoil Engine if Condescend doesn't dig us into a Tronland. Ideally here you would like to refrain from cracking the Map until you've found your second Tronland, avoiding the issue of drawing the same land you just tutored with Map.
  - 2) This hand is awkward, but still an acceptable hand. We have a counterspell, a decent threat, and Chalice might just win by itself. This hand's main issue is that we're so far from Tron that Mindslayer is a long way off, however given the Academy Ruins we can happily pitch the Mindslayer to any Thirsts that we draw for card advantage, and hopefully we can draw more interaction from the Remand and get to Wurmcoil. Thoughtseize taking the Remand is a real issue for this hand.
  - 3) This hand is a long way from Tron, but has good interaction from the two blue spells. Gearhulk is a bit awkward given that we don't yet have a flashback target for it, but Oblivion Stone could be an excellent card to base the game plan of this hand around and against most decks will likely see the board on turn 4.

The majority of hands you will draw will fall into this category – hands that need some thought to play correctly. Unfortunately, given the nature of control and the wide open Modern meta, it's impossible to cover all the lines of play. Some situations and opponents may make these hands perfect or completely useless, but as a rough guide in order of importance, a good hand should:

- Contain a blue source,
- Have between 2 and 4 lands,
- Have some early-game interaction, the more varied the better,
- Be able to a reasonable pathway for getting to a stabiliser,
- Be close to Tron,

Occasionally some of these guidelines can be overlooked if you're in a situation where your hand has a strong card against the opponent, like Chalice against Living End or Ashiok against Titan. However, even in these scenarios, it's important to see if the hand has any real way of continuing our game plan after these cards have bought us time to draw into something relevant. 6 lands and a Chalice is not a keepable hand.

## BORDERLINE HANDS



The hands shown here are borderline keepable. These hands crucially are all lacking a blue source, but do have a way of getting one, or have other cards to play in the meantime:

- 1) This hand is more keepable than the other two – it has a turn three Wurmcoil Engine but cannot cast anything else in the hand unless you draw a blue source, so for now relies entirely on the Wurm being good. The playability of this hand comes from the fact that efficient removal of the lands (Field of Ruin, Ghost Quarter) or the Wurm (Path to Exile) will probably give you a blue source and switch on the rest of your hand. The dangers here are Thoughtseize and Stone Rain effects, or Wurmcoil just being irrelevant (against Storm, for instance).
- 2) This hand lives on Field of Ruin, since at this point this is our only way of playing the rest of our hand. Whilst this is a definite blue source, it could well be too slow to matter if your opponent has a way to capitalise on you doing nothing for the first three turns. If you draw a blue source immediately, this hand becomes incredibly good. We also have the option of topdecking the third Tron piece and hoping Angel is good enough until the blue source appears.
- 3) This hand is barely keepable. We are far from Tron, and have no blue source. This hand relies on drawing the latter to get the Condescend online, and if this is done quickly this becomes a reasonably good hand. Failing that, the plan here is to use Chalice and Spatial to slow the opponent down until we play Solemn, which finds us a blue source and hopefully lets us get back into the game.

The choice to mulligan hands like these is completely dependent on the deck you're playing. Hand 1 is good against creature aggro decks that won't be attacking your lands, and hand 2 is a perfectly acceptable keep against control, since you'll have time to get to the blue source before the game really starts. Hand 3 is a tough keep, but works well against something like Prowess, where Chalice and Spatial could buy a lot of time and Solemn blocks effectively. These are often the hands that require the most thought, and a good strategy is to plan your first few lines of play and work out how many live draws you have versus useless ones given your hand.

## MULLIGANS



The hands shown here are pretty much unkeepable. Either they don't have any spells we can play, or the hand is completely dependent on immediately drawing good cards. This section only shows two examples, since diving into the endless pit of theoretically unkeepable hands serves little purpose here. To explain each hand:

- 1) This hand has a decent array of spells, but the lands just don't match them. We have no blue source and no way of getting one, and are nowhere near Tron. If we topdeck a blue source then this becomes a viable hand, but if we don't then we just can't play anything, so it's usually too risky to keep unless you know you'll have a lot of time.
- 2) This hand has a better group of lands, but the spells are poor. We have two copies of Chalice, which might be good but also might just not do anything, and we're a long way from playing Angel. Here, we need to topdeck good blue spells every turn or the other two Tronlands to allow us to execute our game plan. As with the other hand, if this fails then we just can't do anything meaningful.

It is worth noting that these hands being unkeepable is not a result of the individual cards being bad. It's easy to think 'hand 2 has two Chalices and is a bad hand, so Chalice is bad', but this isn't true. The hands here are bad because the lands don't match the spells, or because we haven't drawn any of our control magic. A hand with multiple copies of the same support card and nothing else is a bad hand for any deck, but it does not mean the support card should be taken out.

## CLOSING NOTES

UTron is an extremely powerful deck in the right hands. Our insane card and mana advantages come at a steep price; locking ourselves into a single colour without the bonus of being able to play aggressively costed ‘mono’ spells like Cryptic Command. Blue is a strong control colour, but lacks in decent hard removal, making the deck seem very fragile to those who are used to playing with blunter cards like Fatal Push and Kolaghan’s Command. To these players, the deck just seems like a pile of bad control cards and Tron threats shuffled together, because their decks are used to being able to straight-up remove anything that stops the proactive part of their gameplan.

Our deck doesn’t need to do this. The inclusion of Tron and the cards that come with it mean we are only required to delay and disrupt the opponent’s strategy, keeping the pace and threat level of what they’re doing under control until we can start dropping our stabilisers, then continue to disrupt them fighting through the bigger cards. The strength of our mid-late game means that we don’t need to completely stop the opponent, only get them into a place where they feel like they took too long and are now too low on gas to deal with the stabilisers. The longer the game goes on, the more chance we have of winning, all the way up to an assured victory with Mindslaver lock.

This idea is exemplified by our normal strategy against aggro decks, using counterspells, blockers and bounce spells to preserve our life total, then dropping a Wurmcoil on turn 6. They probably have a few threats remaining, but our strategy of dampening their gameplan means that now they just can’t get enough damage through the Wurmcoil to kill us. We didn’t need to fully stop everything they did with hard removal or boardwipes, as more conventional control decks are required to do. We bought enough time to play a card that means they can’t win before we get to our inevitability, and we can now continue to disrupt their game and ensure they can’t get back into a position that threatens us.

This is how our deck works. We’re clearly a draw-go control deck, but could also be described as the slowest tempo deck ever built. Our entire strategy revolves around playing cards that stop our opponent winning until we get into a situation they can’t beat anyway. That situation could be just an Ugin, a Wurmcoil with Chalice on 1, a recurable Oblivion Stone, or a Karn finding a Liquimetal coating to never let them past 4 lands. These board states might not always win on the spot, but they stop the opponent’s ability to just snatch a win over our ‘mono colour limited’ control magic. Our stabilisers complement our gamplan of disrupting our opponent, and ensure that the other player just doesn’t have the card advantage or raw power to push through the stabiliser *and* the ongoing control cards until we land another stabiliser, or just win with Mindslaver. Throughout the game we continue saying ‘no, not yet’ until we turn around and win.

Once this idea is realised, suddenly the whole deck makes sense. Our control cards aren’t necessarily all hard removal, but they all delay and disrupt very well, and all dig us towards our stabilisers. Our tutoring creatures allow us to block and buy more time, and come with card advantage stapled to them. Our stabilisers are all enormous road blocks and speed bumps that the opponent has to spend considerable time and resources dealing with before they can start to get near threatening us again. We have ridiculous draw spells to keep ahead of the opponent in card advantage, Tron to keep ahead in mana, and an unbeatable inevitability. UTron is an absolutely beautiful deck when played with the correct mindset, as all the cards harmonise together into a single, adaptable, well-oiled machine to get the job done.

I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.

## APPENDIX 1: MATCHUPS AND SIDEBOARDING

This appendix covers a brief look at how we match up against a wide range of established Modern decks that you may face. The advice of both play lines and sideboarding strategies assume that the opponent is on a fairly standard version of their deck and doesn't take time to consider wildly deviating brews or otherwise 'spicy' inclusions. Each section includes a categorisation of the deck respecting the ideas presented in [Your Opponent's Deck](#), along with our favourability, lists of the telltale cards, and UTron's best and worst cards in that matchup.

Since this section is large, a quick summary of each matchup is included here.

Matchup	Rating	Deck Type
<b>Aggro</b>		
Burn	Average	Proactive, Redundant
Infect	Average/Poor	Proactive, Essential
Humans	Poor	Proactive, Redundant
Merfolk	Very Poor	Proactive, Redundant
Prowess	Average/Good	Proactive, Essential
Bogles	Average/Poor	Proactive, Essential
Mill	Average/Poor	Proactive, Redundant
Dredge	Poor	Proactive, Redundant
<b>Midrange</b>		
Jund Piles	Good	Proactive, Redundant
Abzan Piles	Good	Proactive, Redundant (Midrange)/ Essential (Combo)
Eldrazi Tron	Good	Proactive, Redundant
Grixis Death's Shadow	Average	Proactive, Redundant
Soulherder	Good/Average	Proactive, Redundant
Ponza	Average	Proactive, Redundant
Death and Taxes	Average	Proactive, Redundant
<b>Control</b>		
UGx Control	Average	Reactive, Redundant
8-Rack	Good	Proactive, Redundant
Blue Moon	Good	Reactive, Redundant/Essential (if Through the Breach)
Mono Red Prison	Very Good	Proactive, Redundant
Mono U Tron	Average	Reactive, Redundant
<b>Combo</b>		
Ad Nauseam	Good	Proactive, Essential
Neobrand	Average	Proactive, Essential
Storm	Average/Good	Proactive, Essential
Gx Tron	Average	Proactive, Essential
Amulet Titan	Average/Good	Proactive, Essential
Goblins	Good	Proactive, Essential with Redundant backup
Whirza Variants	Good	Proactive with Reactive elements, Essential
Living End	Very Good	Proactive, Essential

## AGGRO DECKS

'Aggro' stands for 'aggressive', and is the name for the archetype of decks that are trying to kill you as quickly as possible. Usually this involves playing low cost efficient-by-themselves creatures or tribal creatures that synergise with each other, but can also be done with spells. Aggro decks are tough for UTron whatever the strategy, since our lack of cheap efficient kill spells and very early game interaction often mean these decks get underneath our counterspells and we're forced to play catch-up. Our card advantage also won't matter during the early turns where the aggro player is trying to fight. We have a number of speed bumps to deploy like Chalice, Spatial and Ensnares Bridge, and these can often slow the aggro down enough for us to make our card advantage matter and turn the game around.

## BURN

### Favourability:

Average

### Archetype:

Proactive, Redundant

### Telltale Cards:

- Lightning Bolt
- Boros Charm
- Goblin Guide
- Eidolon of the Great Revel
- Lava Spike

### Telltale Lands:

- Sacred Foundry
- Inspiring Vantage

Burn covers all variants of red spell-based decks that want to get your life total to 0 as quickly as they can. They utilise a combination of cheap red damage spells (Lightning Bolt, Lava Spike) and cheap fast creatures (Goblin Guide) to hit at your life total and kill you before than you can enact your own game plan.

These decks come in a few variants:

- Mono Red Burn: Has a more consistent manabase and is a cheaper deck, but lacks access to Boros Charm and white sideboard cards.
- RW Burn – The typical build, contains a balance of the strongest Burn spells available.
- RB/RWB Burn – A variant that splashes black for Bump in the Night and sideboard options.

Burn can be a tough matchup, but we have ways to fight back. The combination of fast, cheap spells and creatures and a linear reliable game plan means our counterspells are awkward and we often don't have the time to get our wall up before our life total becomes too low. Our game plan doesn't change too much with the variants of Burn we're facing, apart from those without white being weaker to Wurmcoil and Angel, which are the best stabilisers we have against them. Even though our counterspells are tough against the multitude of cheap spells they have that all do the same thing, we have Chalice as a good card to slow them down. Chalice is good on both 1 and 2 here, with the edge slightly on 2, as their artifact removal is normally Smash to Smithereens. Getting a Chalice on both 1

and 2 is very strong. Our removal and bounce is good against their cheap creatures; Repeal, Spatial and Warping Wail are all relevant cards, whereas Dismember's life cost is usually just unacceptable. We also have blockers that will often trade with their low toughness attackers.

Your game plan should hope to see Ballista, Spatial, Chalice, Angel and Wurmcoil Engine, as these are your best cards here. Often a single Wurmcoil connecting can set them back long enough to steal the game, and if you can untap with Angel or get a Chalice down, you're in great shape as they'll have to waste spells and time dealing with it. Ugin's strength here is largely dependent on whether you're facing more creatures or more spells, although his ultimate is obviously great. At 4 CMC, Karn is usually boarded out in favour of bringing in more Ballistas, Chalices and Wurmcoils. You can use Mazemind Tome to aggressively scry and hit the 4-life trigger to deny them their reach.

Tips and tricks:

- Let Goblin Guide triggers resolve before hitting it with Repeal or Spatial, so you get the land if there is one.
- Scry lands to the top if they have a Guide to attack you.
- Eidolon is the card what will hurt you the most if you don't have Tron, since it hits a lot of our interactive spells.
- Remanding a spell with Spectacle is a decent play if they have to work to retrigger Spectacle again next turn.

Good Cards:

- Chalice of the Void
- Wurmcoil Engine
- Platinum Angel
- Repeal
- Spatial Contortion
- Walking Ballista
- Spellskite

Bad Cards:

- Remand
- Dismember
- Cyclonic Rift

## INFECT

Favourability:  
Average/Poor

Archetype:  
Proactive, Essential

Telltale Cards:

- Glistener Elf
- Blighted Agent
- Might of Old Krosa
- Become Immense
- Vines of Vastwood
- Scale Up

Telltale Lands:

- Inkmoth Nexus
- Pendalhaven

Infect is an aggro-combo deck, whose game plan is to play a cheap creature with Infect, pump it as much as they can and then win the game in one or two alpha-strokes. It has the capability to do this on turn 2 if it draws a good hand, and even failing that is a blisteringly fast deck that can kill you before you've even got into the game.

Since all of Infect's pump spells (with the exception of Become Immense) are CMC 1, our counterspells have a hard time in this matchup. The silver lining here is that Chalice on 1 is incredibly strong against them. Untapping with an

early Chalice means you can protect it, and only have to really worry about Become Immense, which is easier to stop with counters. Certainly a good sign of them having the Delve spell is if they start aggressively wasting their pump spells into Chalice.

Our removal is also good, but needs to be timed well against their pump spells. Dismember is one of the best cards here since the life total payment is rarely relevant; the only creature than can attack your life total is Noble Hierarch. Repeal is again strong as a response to them chaining pump spells, but be careful of Vines of Vastwood. Field of Ruin and other land denial spells are very important here against Inkmoth Nexus, which is hard to deal with otherwise since a lot of our spells specify ‘nonland’. Ballista is excellent here, as all their creatures are toughness 1 and you can respond to their pump spells with further activations.

When considering stabilisers, perhaps one of the hardest cards to evaluate is Wurmcoil Engine. The card is still a big blocker with deathtouch, but the lifegain (which is usually this card’s strong point) is completely irrelevant here. Wurmcoil is therefore regulated to being a big chump blocker, but will not stabilise you against Infect as is therefore acceptable to sideboard out. Platinum Angel is much stronger, as sometimes they just have no way to remove it and will concede on the spot. Ugin is also great if you can get to him, and Walking Ballista can sometimes single-handedly control the board.

Tips and tricks:

- Don’t take the initiative after they attack. Say ‘no blocks’ then let them show their pump spells before you start tapping for removal.
- None of their creatures have haste. If you can get removal in on your turn whilst they’re tapped out, it’s better to have it definitely resolve than to run into a hexproof spell.
- Unless you need to dig, try and save Repeal for when they go for an alpha strike so you get an X-for-1.
- Inkmoth Nexus is probably their best threat. It has evasion and is hard to hit when it’s not a creature. It’s worth boarding in some more land hate cards solely for this threat.

Good Cards:

- Chalice of the Void
- Dismember
- Platinum Angel
- Repeal
- Spatial Contortion
- Walking Ballista
- Spellskite

Bad Cards:

- Wurmcoil Engine
- Remand
- Solemn Simulacrum

## HUMANS

Favourability:  
Poor

Archetype:  
Proactive, Redundant

Telltale Cards:

- Champion of the Parish
- Kitesail Freebooter
- Meddling Mage
- Thalia’s Lieutenant

Telltale Lands:

- Cavern of Souls (Humans)
- Ancient Ziggurat
- Unclaimed Territory

Humans is a deck that appeared on the scene during Ixalan Standard, since the block added a lot of new utility creatures. Humans is a tribal aggro deck that exemplifies Wizards' trend for stapling good spells onto already on-cost creatures. Cards like Meddling Mage, Kitesail Freebooter and Thalia are suitably costed for their stats and keywords, but also come with decent interactive abilities on them. Humans also have synergistic cards like Thalia's Lieutenant and Champion of the Parish, which grow their creatures quite quickly.

Humans is a tough matchup for us, since they are an aggro deck that can seriously hamper our strategy with prison-style interaction from Thalia and Meddling Mage, and discard effects from Freebooter. They can also run all sorts of utility humans like Reflector Mage and Dark Confidant, to the point where Humans feels like a strong aggro deck that gets to do everything else too.

Our saving grace is that the aggro from Humans is often marginally slower, and more about building up a synergy of creatures over single threats that do well by themselves. Our interaction is therefore more effective at only stopping the dangerous synergy cards, since a Meddling Mage or a Freebooter by itself isn't going to kill us fast enough. Humans is only especially dangerous if they build up a critical mass of creatures, and disregarding Aether Vial and Cavern of Souls, we have many ways to prevent that.

Meddling Mage deserves special mention, since by way of our deck being the less popular deck with Tron, people will often name cards like Karn Liberated, or go after your ability to get to Tron and name Expedition Map. For this reason is it sometimes correct to let Meddling Mage resolve game 1, and hope they choose badly or narrowly. Even them naming Mindslaver is far better than Spatial, Thirst, Ugin or Oblivion Stone, since they've stopped only one card in your deck that (in this matchup) is only really good for your inevitability. Mage is worth stopping if they've just seen your hand from Freebooter, since they'll have a better idea of what to name.

Our aggro stabilisers are all quite good. Ugin is the usual house as all their threats are coloured and low cost enough for Ugin to still be on a high loyalty after wiping the board. Wurmcoil and Platinum Angel are strong since their manabase prevents them from running Path to Exile; the card to watch out for here is Reflector Mage. Oblivion Stone is probably our best card in the matchup, as they have no way to really deal with it and we can cast it early. Cyclonic Rift is also nice to reset their countered-up creatures, and Karn can both stop Aether Vial and tutor up and Ensnaring Bridge, which they can't deal with if we have a near-empty hand.

Tips and tricks:

- The way Kitesail Freebooter is worded means you can happily kill it in response to its trigger and not lose a card. They'll still get to look at your hand and choose one, but since Freebooter is already gone, the exile effect doesn't happen. This wouldn't work against cards with separate triggers like Tidehollow Sculler.
- If you manage to get a Platinum Angel down then your game plan should immediately revolve around stopping Reflector Mage, as they usually have no other way to kill her and only Mantis Rider blocks to stop her killing them.

Good Cards:

- Spatial Contortion
- Dismember
- Platinum Angel
- Ugin, the Spirit Dragon
- Wurmcoil Engine
- Oblivion Stone
- Silent Arbiter

Bad Cards:

- Chalice of the Void
- Solemn Simulacrum

## MERFOLK

### Favourability:

Very Poor

### Archetype:

Proactive, Redundant

### Telltale Cards:

- Cursecatcher
- Master of Waves
- Silvergill Adept
- Lord of Atlantis
- Master of the Pearl Trident

### Telltale Lands:

- Mutavault

Welcome to our worst matchup. Merfolk is a tribal aggro deck that runs a multitude of ‘lord’ creatures to buff each other up and beat you to death, along with the normal array of strong tribal cards like Cavern and Vial. The main strength of Merfolk against our deck is their ample ability to gift their entire army with Islandwalk, rendering our blockers useless. To compliment this game plan, they usually run mainboard Spreading Seas, and so can attack our lands if we try and go for an early Tron. On top of this, being in blue they can fight us on the stack with counters and bounce spells and other tempo plays, and some of their creatures have interactive effects, protection effects or card draw stapled onto them. All in all, they have decent resilience against every way we could try and stop them.

Merfolk runs a number of functionally identical lord creatures; UU costing 2/2s that give all other Merfolk +1/+1 and in most cases Islandwalk. These are the key cards of the deck, and ones that should be targeted with interaction, as allowing them to build up and start applying the buffs to each other is a ticket to a quick death unless you have a boardwipe ready to go. Thankfully these have low starting toughness and so get hit by all our removal.

Chalice is either fantastic on 2 if they have no Cavern or Vial, or average on 1 to stop Vapor Snag on your Wurmcoil or Angel. This variance and their ability to ignore it here is usually not worth its inclusion postboard.

Ugin is our best stabiliser, doing his usual job of just eating the board and remaining on high loyalty. Oblivion Stone can often do the same thing, whilst also hitting any Vials they have out. Engineered Explosives is very good if you can get it on 2, as all their lords and the majority of their creatures are of CMC 2. Apart from boardwipes, Platinum Angel is hard from them to remove, since you can save your counters for Echoing Truth, Vapor Snag and Dismember. Be careful attacking with Angel, since this can turn on Harbringer of the Tides. Wurmcoil is a good beater but will very often not be able to block, meaning it needs to survive a turn to stabilise, and often they’ll be able to race against gaining 6 life per turn. Karn is good at fetching hate pieces like Ensnaring Bridge, as well as turning off Aether Vial whilst he lives.

Our chances against Merfolk are largely dependent on how aggressive a hand they draw. If they have no Vial, no turn 1 play and so have to play lords one by one, we should be able to use counter and kill spells to preserve our life total until the midgame where we have a chance to fight them with our threats. However if they have a hyper aggressive start with Cavern into Vial, Cursecatcher into lord, then sometimes all you can do is pray for a boardwipe or sit back and wait for the pain to be over.

### Tips and tricks:

- Combat tricks like letting them attack then targeting a lord with removal to turn off Islandwalk and open up favourable blocks are a good way to gain advantage.

## Good Cards:

- Spatial Contortion
- Dismember
- Ugin, the Spirit Dragon
- Platinum Angel
- Oblivion Stone

## Bad Cards:

- Solemn Simulacrum

## PROWESS

### Favourability:

Average/Good

### Archetype:

Proactive, Essential

### Telltale Cards:

- Soul-Scar Mage
- Monastery Swiftspear
- Manamorphose
- Lava Dart

### Telltale Lands:

- Steam Vents

Prowess is a very fast aggressive deck that seeks to play creatures with its namesake ability and then chain cheap spells and burn effects to swing for increasing amounts of damage. The deck is fast, resilient and with Bedlam Reveler has the ability to grind out for its reach.

Prowess is more resilient to Chalice on 1 than it first seems. Despite playing ~25 one-drops, the nature of the prowess mechanic means that a couple of creatures resolved under a Chalice still allow them to throw spells into their graveyard just for the prowess triggers and swing for a large amount of damage. Chalice is still exceptionally good here, but the priority is always to get their creatures off the board, as their spells are rarely good for direct damage without also having the effect of triggering prowess. Here Repeal, Spatial, Dismember, Walking Ballista, Warping Wail and Cyclonic Rift are all excellent cards, especially if you can bounce their creatures and trap them behind Chalice next turn. The only creature to worry about after Chalice is Stormwing Entity, which whilst harder to bounce is harder for them to replay and is a great Remand target to slow them down.

Wurmcoil and Angel are the best finishers here, with Ugin also doing well to clear all their creatures off the board and potentially gain some life. If you have time to resolve a Mazemind Tome, use the scry ability every turn since the life gain is very important. Thought-Knot Seer does very well to take a good spell from their hand and block favourably, and Ballista can mow down their board if cast with a decent amount of mana. As with Burn, it is worth boarding out Karn in favour of bringing in his relevant tutor targets as turn 4 is just too slow.

### Tips and tricks:

- Remember when using Ballista, Ugin upticks and Spatial that they can play free spells like Mutagenic and Gut shot to give their creatures enough toughness to survive. Usually it's safer to just -X Ugin, even against Stormwing Entity.
- If they have only resolved a single creature, tap out for Chalice. If they have multiple, it's likely that you'll die if you don't hold up interaction.
- Dismember is worth keeping in even given the painful cost, as their creatures are so dangerous if allowed to attack and will very likely hit you for 4+ life anyway.

### Good Cards:

- Dismember
- Spatial Contortion
- Walking Ballista
- Repeal
- Chalice of the Void
- Gemstone Caverns
- Wurmcoil Engine
- Platinum Angel

### Bad Cards:

- Karn, the Great Creator

## BOGLES

### Favourability:

Average/Poor

### Archetype:

Proactive, Essential

### Telltale Cards:

- Slippery Bogle
- Gladecover Scout
- Kor Spiritdancer
- Dryad Arbor

### Telltale Lands:

- Razorverge Thicket
- Horizon Canopy

Bogles, GW Auras, or BuildyourownEmrakul.dec, is a deck that wins the game by putting a mountain of Auras on a creature with Hexproof, then beats down with their giant monstrosity. The deck runs 8 'Bogle' creatures and has Kor Spiritdancer to allow them to turn all their Auras into cantrips for continued gas.

Hexproof means our removal and bounce is much worse. The removal is still good on Spiritdancer, and the bounce is still good at hitting the more powerful enchantments to slow them down, but this matchup generally revolves around us getting either quick Tron and Ugin, or having Chalice of the Void, Engineered Explosives, Bridge or Spellsrite. All of these hate cards are incredibly strong if they come down early enough; Chalice (on 1) blanks roughly 30 of their nonland spells, including both their Bogles, EE destroys everything, Bridge quickly becomes an impenetrable barrier and Spellsrite is a wall that deters them from casting Auras.

Wurmcoil Engine is good against any Bogles that don't have first strike, as that turns off Wurmo's stabilisation role. Platinum Angel is a strong card if you can defend against Path to Exile and Seal of Primordium from the board. Oblivion Stone, Cyclonic Rift, Engineered Explosives and Ugin are all fantastic ways of completely resetting the board, just watch out for Umbra triggers from the Stone and EE. Mindslaver by itself is very average, since they have Leyline of Sanctity mainboard and their gameplan isn't very soft to us controlling them for a turn.

Overall, it's fair to aggressively mulligan to Tron, Chalice or other hate cards. Even a hand full of bounce won't stop them from killing you for very long, so these cards should be used to preserve your life total as much as possible until you can get a boardwipe down or get an Ensnaring Bridge from a Karn. From there you can build back into the game whilst they dig for more threats. Your blockers are also good to buy you time to get to the important cards.

### Tips and tricks:

- Bounce spells are at their best hitting the sole Aura on a Bogle in response to Daybreak Coronet for a 2-for-1.

- Kor Spiritdancer is a very high priority target due to its draw trigger.

Good Cards:

- Spellskite
- Chalice of the Void
- Engineered Explosives
- Ugin, the Spirit Dragon
- Platinum Angel
- Ensnaring Bridge
- Oblivion Stone

Bad Cards:

- Remand
- Dismember

## MILL

Favourability:

Average/Poor

Archetype:

Proactive, Redundant

Telltale Cards:

- Hedron Crab
- Mesmeric Orb
- Glimpse the Unthinkable
- Archive Trap
- Jace's Phantasm

Telltale Lands:

- Shelldock Isle

Mill gets its name from the card Millstone, which can repeatedly deck the top two cards of a player's library. Modern Mill takes that idea and runs haywire with it, aiming to aggressively 'mill' the entirety of its opponent's into their graveyard before they can enact their gameplan. To protect itself, it runs a number of blockers that enable its strategy like Hedron Crab and Manic Scribe, and makes use of Ensnaring Bridge to hold off the opponent.

Mill is weak to aggressive strategies that don't care about or can remove Ensnaring Bridge, like Burn or Jund. Unfortunately, we are not one of those decks; whilst we don't care about Bridge, we're not aggressive enough to punish the Mill player for fielding a slow strategy. We push the game to go on as long as possible, which means the Mill player has a free run for their idea without having to protect themselves. Mill's strategy is good against us for two main reasons; we need the cards in our deck for our endgame to work properly, and we help them count to 60 by cantripping, drawing with Thirst and turning on Archive Trap with our many search spells.

Our key card is Academy Ruins. Whilst this lives on the field, it's enormously difficult for them to mill us out, and we can recur things like Platinum Angel and Walking Ballista and get to Mindlock. Just be very careful when playing around Mesmeric Orb and only activate after the triggers from that have finished. Mill uses a reasonable number of Ghost Quarters and Field of Ruins mainboard, but they will use these aggressively to take us off Tron and trigger Archive Trap if they're unfamiliar with the deck. To encourage this, try and keep Ruins in your hand until they've used up as much land destruction as you can bear waiting for. If they run out of ways to kill it, you have a very good chance of winning.

Apart from Ruins, we need to aim to use our counterspells to hit their bigger Mill spells, and point our removal at Hedron Crab and Jace's Phantasm. Try to do as little tutoring as you can to leave Archive Trap in their hand, and get a clock down fast since 20 life is less than 53 cards to count to. This is a tough matchup and we need to try and run them out of cards.

Chalice is best on 1, stopping a good number of their mill spells, and crucially Visions of Beyond, which rapidly becomes Ancestral Recall, arguably the most powerful card ever printed in Magic.

Tips and tricks:

- Only tutor if the bonus you get is worth losing 13 cards, as they'll nearly always have Archive Trap. Karn does not trigger the trap.
- Snapcaster and Gearhulk become very strong, since they should always have good targets in the mass of milled cards.
- If you sideboard any of the original Eldrazi titans, now is the time to bring them in.

Good Cards:

- Academy Ruins
- Chalice of the Void
- Platinum Angel
- Snapcaster Mage
- Torrential Gearhulk

Bad Cards:

- Dismember

## DREDGE

Favourability:

Poor

Archetype:

Proactive, Redundant

Telltale Cards:

- Shriekmaw
- Creeping Chill
- Cathartic Reunion
- Bloodghast
- Narcomoeba
- Prized Amalgam

Telltale Lands:

- Blackleafe Cliffs
- Dakmor Salvage
- Copperline Gorge
- 

Dredge exists in some form in all nonrotating formats. The deck is based around using cards with its namesake ability to fill up its own graveyard, then get free animation triggers from Narcomoeba, Bloodghast and Prized Amalgam to generate an endlessly recurable free board of small creatures. The deck wins by attacking you to death, has Conflagrate's flashback mode for reach and Creeping Chill to just randomly dome you for 3 throughout the game.

Dredge's gameplan is hard to interact with, since their creatures come into play in a way that we can't counter. Similarly, using our spot removal and even boardwipes on them is not a reliable plan, as most of their creatures are just one land drop away from all coming back. Our only real option against them is graveyard hate or rushing to a stabiliser. Wurmcoil is very strong against their smaller creatures, and they have to invest cards and time into dealing with it, gaining us some life. Ugin is our best card, as he exiles everything to make sure they don't come back. Angel is useful, as they don't run a mainboard way of dealing with her outside of Conflagrate, which is readily answered by Remand. Mindslaver is only really good for the lock, since we can't do much to damage them if they already have a big board presence, outside Conflagrating them to death.

A great option out of the board to buy time is Silent Arbiter. This can stall the board by itself, and toughness 5 is bigger than all their creatures (and takes a lot to Conflagrate to death). Unfortunately, they have Ancient Grudge and Lightning Axe coming out of the board, so our counterspells need to be ready to protect our Arbiter. Similarly, Platinum Angel is something they won't be able to beat with their primary strategy, and if you can protect it from their sideboard artifact hate you'll be in a good position. They only have the 1/1 Narcomoeba to block flyers, and 4 damage a turn is usually quicker than us running out of counterspells.

Chalice is worth boarding out here, it's too slow a play and doesn't hit many cards. This gives you more room to board in graveyard hate.

Tips and tricks:

- Most of the time, we win by throwing blockers and graveyard hate in the way and rushing to Wurmcoil. It's acceptable to mull more aggressively towards this objective.
- Karn is very useful to fetch both graveyard hate and Ensnaring Bridge.
- Sometimes it's better to leave a Bloodghast on the battlefield rather than killing it and letting a fetchland trigger bring back a whole army.

Good Cards:

- Wurmcoil Engine
- Ugin, the Spirit Dragon
- Grafdigger's Cage
- Silent Arbiter

Bad Cards:

- Chalice of the Void
- Dismember

## MIDRANGE DECKS

Midrange decks are all about value. They are often a collection of the strong isolated cards in the colour combination of the deck, and seek to grind out 1 for 1 trades to turn the game into a state where both players are low on gas. Here, the midrange player has better isolated topdecks and will continue to grind out a win. Midrange decks are usually a good matchup for us, since trying to grind value against Thirst for Knowledge is rarely a winning strategy, and as the game progresses our threats are just stronger than theirs.

The strength of the matchup is dependent on how aggressive the midrange deck is in the early turns; a chain of discard spells or a quick Tarmogoyf can do well, but a slower start with the aim of playing powerful three and four drops is something we are well equipped to fight. Usually we'll be aiming to drop a Wurmcoil Engine here, which even if removed will buy us a great deal of time and card advantage. Sundering Titan is often the game-winner of choice against the greedy manabases typical of midrange decks.

## JUND PILES

### Favourability:

Good

### Archetype:

Proactive, Redundant

### Telltale Cards:

- Thoughtseize
- Inquisition of Kozilek
- Tarmogoyf
- Wrenn and Six
- Bloodbraid Elf
- Kolaghan's Command
- Liliana of the Veil

### Telltale Lands:

- Overgrown Tomb
- Blood Crypt
- Stomping Ground

Jund is the classic midrange deck. Named simply after the colour combination it plays, Jund takes the best cards that black, red and green have to offer and puts them in a pile. The game plan of the deck is to trade 1 for 1, grind value and run the opponent out of resources, knowing that each card the Jund player topdecks is very strong on its own. The opponent is then left with no relevant cards to stop the Jund threats.

Jund's scariest weapon against us is the array of one mana discard spells. We need to have cards in our hand and often two or more of these in the first two turns can significantly cripple our ability to answer their threats. Chalice often comes down too late to stop these, although often saves more important cards like Thirst by being infamous enough for the Jund player to take with Thoughtseize. We have no real hedge against multiple early discard, apart from hoping they make incorrect choices, we topdeck well or we have early Tron and can just start playing stronger threats.

The rest of the matchup is good news. With the exception of Bloodbraid Elf our counterspells shine here, as their game plan is just to curve their hand out as best they can and they have very little in the way of interacting on the stack. Our normal idea of holding up interaction and progressing our gameplan in the background should work well. Dismember is better removal than Spatial here, as Grim Flayer and Tarmogoyf quickly get too big for Spatial to matter. However it's worth keeping both in if you see them running lots of Dark Confidants or Huntmaster of the Fells. Thirst for Knowledge serves its usual role as our best card to win against a grindy deck, and Fact or Fiction allows us to leap ahead in cards and very often win us the game. Often their only real weapon to compete with our card advantage is Lurrus, and the companion cat should be a primary target to save removal for if you either see Mishra's Bauble or see it in the companion zone.

Our best threat is Wurmcoil. This buys us a ton of time and often trades as a 3 for 1, which gains a huge advantage on the exact platform of magic they're trying to win on. It trades well with their creatures, gains us time and they can't remove it efficiently. The only minor worry is a Liliana tickdown followed by Maelstrom Pulse to wipe both the tokens, but this is rare and can be stopped with counterspells.

Whilst Wurmcoil is very good, Platinum Angel is distinctly average, They have so many ways to remove her that unless you're at death's door or have a wall of counterspells to protect her, she's not worth tutoring up and is usually boarded out game 2. Sundering Titan is a far better choice if for some reason you're not getting Wurmcoil. It usually destroys three lands and will be able to block all their threats. Karn is good in that it generates multiple cards in hand and may eat a Goyf attack, but can be slow if they're pressuring you. Ensnaring Bridge however can

sometimes be a house against Jund, as it gives us the time to complete Tron and just slam Wurmcoil and Sundering Titan to victory.

Tips and tricks:

- Jund is as redundant as it gets. Every threat has the ability to kill you, however most are invalidated by Wurmcoil Engine or Ugin. Our key to winning is just to lean on our superior card advantage and go over the top of them with Tron.
- Playing any creature against a sole Liliana will usually make them tick down, which is useful to delay the ultimate. If it's a Walking Ballista as your only creature make sure to respond to the Liliana activation by shooting her all the way.
- Bouncing a Liliana in response to her tick-up when your opponent is hellbent forces them to discard it.

Good Cards:

- Wurmcoil Engine
- Sundering Titan
- Torrential Gearhulk
- Ugin, the Spirit Dragon
- Karn, the Great Creator

Bad Cards:

- Platinum Angel
- Chalice of the Void

## ABZAN PILES

Favourability:

Good

Archetype:

Proactive,  
Redundant (Midrange)/  
Essential (Combo)

Telltale Cards:

- Thoughtseize
- Inquisition of Kozilek
- Noble Hierarch
- Lingering Souls
- Kitchen Finks
- Voice of Resurgence
- Liliana of the Veil

Telltale Lands:

- Overgrown Tomb
- Temple Garden
- Godless Shrine

Abzan is Jund's brighter brother. The deck usually works in the exact same way, by playing the best cards in green, white and black and grinding the opponent out of resources. Abzan can have a number of variants:

- Midrange Abzan (Junk): Standard form of the deck obeying the idea of using the best isolated cards in the colours and putting them in a pile. Basically, Siege Rhino and friends.
- Wilted Abzan: Still midrange, but uses more green and white creatures to make Wilt-Leaf Liege really good.
- VizerDruid: Variant that includes (or sometimes focuses around) the Vizer of Remedies & Devoted Druid combo for infinite mana, using Duskwatch Recruiter to find either a Rhonas the Indomitable or Walking Ballista to kill. Other combos with Vizer include Viscera Seer as a sac outlet for Kitchen Finks (infinite life) or Murderous Redcap (infinite damage).

- Abzan Traverse: Similar to Junk but plays Mishra's Bauble and Lurrus to enable faster Delirium and cards like Traverse the Ulvenwald and Grim Flayer.
- Abzan Company: Similar to Junk but leans harder on getting value out of Collected Company and Finale of Devastation with various hatebears. Often uses the various combos with Vizer of Remedies to let Company win out of nowhere.

For UTron, these variants boil down to one question; are they playing strictly midrange, or do they have the combo elements included? This knowledge is fairly vital for our gameplay, since tapping out for Chalice on 1 and Wurmcoil Engine is great against pure midrange, but not so good if they proceed to land both combo elements next turn. Luckily, none of the combo pieces bar Kitchen Finks have any real reason to be played outside of enabling their combo, so seeing any of these cards gives you the information you need to fight the combo element and worry a bit less about value.

For the midrange versions, this matchup is very similar to Jund. All our value pieces (Wurmcoil, Sundering, Gearhulk) and boardwipes still do their job very well, and Thirst continues to be an absurd card. The primary difference here is that white allows Abzan access to Path to Exile, which gives them a very clean answer to Wurmcoil. It is for this reason that Chalice is good in this matchup, whilst also blanking more spells than just the discard suite in Noble Hierarch and Birds of Paradise. It's a fairly safe bet that they'll always have Path, so it's worth holding your Wurmcoils until you have Chalice down or have no other option.

Since Abzan does not have access to red, our artifacts (most notably Platinum Angel and Ensnaring Bridge) get much better. Angel is as vulnerable to Path as Wurmcoil is, but Chalice on 1 and Angel is very hard for them to beat unless they've brought in specific hate like Reclamation Sage, Anguished Unmaking or Naturalize. This also allows you to play Mindslaver and Oblivion Stone in parts, which would be much more risky against red's inclusion of Kolaghan's Command or Ancient Grudge.

The combo versions of the deck are trickier, since they can play a good midrange game but have the option of winning out of nowhere. The two critical cards here (apart from the combo pieces themselves) are Finale of Devastation and Collected Company, both of which have the ability to 'oops, I win' the combo onto the battlefield. Company in particular is instant speed, meaning tapping out for Thirst at the end of their turn isn't as safe. However both of these cards are stopped completely by Grafdigger's Cage, which is a popular sideboard/Karnboard card for us, and can be played around if you have counterspells and keep mana open.

The combos themselves are sometimes not instantly gamewinning against us. Gaining infinite life simply doesn't do anything since we have Slaver lock to kill them eventually, however the Murderous Redcap element kills us stone dead. Similarly, the version of VizerDruid that tries to win with Rhonas can be stopped by Platinum Angel, but the version with Walking Ballista requires Karn. It's important to let them combo off and actually wait for the effects, as a lot of Abzan players might just say 'infinite life, game 2?', mistakenly believing our only way of killing them is by attacking their life total. When trying to stop the combo elements, always respect the potential for them holding up Veil of Summer.

#### Tips and tricks:

- Finale and Company are their best cards but are thankfully quite expensive and so soft to counters.
- Infinite life isn't a problem for us unless for some reason you don't run Mindslaver.
- Remand on flashbacked Lingering Souls or Eldritch Evolution is great value.

### Good Cards:

- Wurmcoil Engine
- Sundering Titan
- Platinum Angel
- Torrential Gearhulk
- Ugin, the Spirit Dragon
- Karn, the Great Creator

### Bad Cards:

- Engineered Explosives

## ELDRAZI TRON

### Favourability:

Good

### Archetype:

Proactive, Redundant

### Telltale Cards:

- Matter Reshaper
- Karn, the Great Creator
- Thought-Knot Seer
- Reality Smasher
- Chalice of the Void

### Telltale Lands:

- Tronlands
- Eldrazi Temple
- Cavern of Souls (Eldrazi)
- Wastes

Eldrazi Tron is an aggressive deck born from the lower-cost Eldrazi that appeared in Oath of the Gatewatch. With the combination of the Tronlands and Eldrazi Temple, Eldrazi Tron aims to power out these creatures earlier than they were meant to be cast and beat the enemy to death with them. As the deck also has the Tronlands included, they run four copies of Karn the Great Creator, alongside a few Ugin, the Ineffables and sometimes Emrakul, the Promised End for some late game power or to abuse naturally drawn Tron.

Eldrazi Tron is a good matchup for us, as their restrictive manabase usually only lets them run 2 Cavern of Souls mainboard. Our counterspells therefore shine against their 4+ mana big threats, even if they're cast a turn or two earlier, and them being an entirely colourless deck means that find it difficult to deal with our threats. Their scariest cards are Thought-Knot Seer for the discard effect, Reality Smasher for the clock and the card disadvantage for removing it, and then the bigger Tron threats in Karn and Emrakul. Counterspells are the best way we have of stopping these, and Dismember shines as being able to hit all their mid-sized Eldrazi creatures.

Our stabilisers are good, with the exception of Ugin, who can't remove any of their scary creatures and won't stop them attacking. Wurmcoil Engine is the best of the bunch, as they can only really answer it with their big Tron threats. If we can keep them off Tron (which we can fairly easily) then Wurmcoil Engine does a good job of dominating the board and buys us loads of time to get to Mindlock. Mindslaver is only really good for the win condition here, as they don't have a great deal of interaction that works against their own board, but can still be strong to walk their creatures into yours to give unfavourable blocks. They have Ballista, Karn, Ulamog and Dismember to answer Platinum Angel, but a lot of these are counterable so Angel is not necessarily bad. Karn is good to shut off their Karn shenanigans and can fetch an Ensnaring Bridge to stop their creatures or a Liquimetal Coating to keep them off Tron.

As they run 4 Chalice of the Void, we should board ours out and be grateful that they mainboard 4 dead cards.

#### Tips and tricks:

- If you only have one piece of removal against a resolved Thought-Knot Seer, use it in response to the trigger so you don't lose it. If you have two, wait for the trigger to resolve and then kill it, so they don't see the extra card.
- A Walking Ballista with a Basilisk's Collar on it will stop you committing creatures to the board, so is worth stopping.

#### Good Cards:

- Wurmcoil Engine
- Dismember
- Spreading Seas
- Karn, the Great Creator

#### Bad Cards:

- Chalice of the Void
- Ugin, the Spirit Dragon

## DEATH'S SHADOW

#### Favourability:

Average

#### Archetype:

Proactive, Redundant

#### Telltale Cards:

- Thoughtseize
- Inquisition of Kozilek
- Death's Shadow
- Stubborn Denial
- Traverse the Ulvenwald
- Gurmag Angler
- Street Wraith

#### Telltale Lands:

- Watery Grave
- Blood Crypt
- Breeding Pool
- Steam Vents

The variants of Death's Shadow are a close to a Legacy deck as it's possible to get in Modern. These decks exemplify the idea of 'Turbo Xerox' decks; those that use cheap cantrips and free cyclers to dig into the cards and lands they need for incredible consistency. The main focus is quickly powering out a 'one mana' big creature in the form of Death's Shadow or a Delve threat, then protecting it through to victory with Stubborn Denial, grinding into more creatures with Traverse and interacting with the opponent's strategy with cards like Abrade, Fatal Push and discard spells. Most variants also use Temur Battle Rage for free wins with Death's Shadow.

The most notable characteristic of the deck is its desire to aggressively lower its own life total. Using an extremely painful manabase and cards like Thoughtseize and Street Wraith, the deck allows Death's Shadow to very easily become a one-mana 5/5 and above, which when attacking in multiples is a very quick road to victory. Shadow uses lots of interaction to ensure it doesn't get punished for putting itself in single digit life early on, and spells like Stubborn Denial to protect its big creatures. Since the deck is also full of cantrips, Thought Scours and free cyclers like Street Wraith, the graveyard can be quickly filled to make Gurmag Angler cost one mana and Tarmogoyf become huge, giving Shadow access to three separate cheap fatties (although they only run 8 creatures total). This, combined with the Turbo Xerox style of deck, allows them to run only 17 lands and still play all their spells, freeing up space for more interaction, threats and removal.

Shadow's insane efficiency and consistency is a problem for us. They can fight us with torrents of discard, very cheap powerful threats and effective interaction from Stubborn Denial. However, the 'dumb' nature of their threats allow our counterspells and bounce effects to be good, our blockers to buy time, and Wurmcoil Engine to completely dominate the board. As with most creature decks not running white, Shadow has a big problem with Wurmcoil Engine. It's bigger than most of their creatures and will trade very effectively with a Shadow.

Our other stabilisers are fairly average. Platinum Angel is soft to the red part of the deck, and Ugin has to cripple or outright kill himself to exile the Delve threats (although he's very strong against multiple Shadows and Goyfs). Karn is very good, being able to find both Chalice and Ensnaring Bridge to prison them out of the game or Wurmcoil and Sundering Titan to finish the job. Our usual value cards are good; Thirst, Repeal and Fact or Fiction provide great value and get us back from the barrage of discard if they resolve. Spatial Contortion is much worse than Dismember, as it's only able to kill irrelevant Snapcasters or very small Shadows. Removal on Shadow is always risky, as they can have uncracked Fetches or Street Wraith to lower their life total at instant speed.

Chalice of the Void is insane. Obviously this is played on 1, and blanks a disgusting 24-26 of their nonland cards. With discard, Stubborn Denial and Ceremonious Rejection out the board it can sometimes be hard to resolve, but usually just stops them doing anything except playing slow Delve threats and waiting to draw Kolaghan's Command or Abrupt Decay. If Chalice resolves the matchup swings dramatically in our favour, as they have no real way of interacting with us and our counters and Dismember are amazing against the only threats they can play. Ensnaring bridge is similarly devastating for their strategy of attacking with big creatures, and will straight up stop them from winning until it is removed. Walking Ballista can also be used as a 'gotcha' if they lower their life total too far.

Tips and tricks:

- Play Chalice, play Bridge, play Wurmcoil Engine.
- Remand is strong against Delve Threats and Snapcaster Mage flashbacks.
- They don't run a great deal of actual threats, but rely on cantrips and Traverse to find them. Often stopping just two of their eight creatures can buy a lot of time whilst they go and find another one.
- Against the Jund variants it is worth bringing in graveyard hate to stop Tarmogoyf and Traverse.

Good Cards:

- Wurmcoil Engine
- Ensnaring Bridge
- Chalice of the Void
- Dismember

Bad Cards:

- Platinum Angel
- Spatial Contortion

## SOULHERDER

### Favourability:

Good/Average

### Archetype:

Proactive, Redundant

### Telltale Cards:

- Southerder
- Coiling Oracle
- Venser, Shaper Savant
- Eternal Witness

### Telltale Lands:

- Bant Fetch/Shock

Soulherder is a deck designed to exploit blink effects on creatures with value ETB triggers. The namesake card paired with Ephemerate allows them to gain multiple copies of the powerful triggers from cards like Eternal Witness, Venser and Uro, Titan of Nature's Wrath whilst drawing cards with Coiling Oracle and Ice-Fang Coatl. The deck wins by outvaluing its opponent, beating them to death with creatures and/or looping Time Walk effects to build up an insurmountable advantage.

The card advantage generated by their blink effects is very hard to keep up with, however against us this deck will usually be punished for not applying sufficient pressure with their low-power creatures. A low-to-the-ground value grind is effective against Jund and Uro piles, but not as effective against Ugin or Sundering Titan. Despite this, we should be careful to not let them gain insurmountable card advantage over us, as they do run interaction in the form of Path to Exile, Assassin's Trophy, Force of Negation and blinking Venser to bounce lands.

Generally, it's best to focus on denying them their two enablers, Soulherder and Ephemerate. The first can be countered or removed as it only starts generating value at the end of their turn, and the latter is best stopped with Chalice on 1. If we can successfully do this, then their deck just becomes a pile of distinctly average value creatures that do not apply sufficient pressure to kill us before we can take over with Tron. Their painful manabase usually prevents them running Field of Ruin and so Tron is a good thing to rely on to go over the top of their value game, as the only ways they have of taking it apart are Assassin's Trophy and Venser. Apart from that, be aware that they'll likely have Yorion as a companion, and this card can swing the game around by giving them a huge oneshot card advantage boost on resolution.

Our stabilisers generally line up well. Wurmcoil and Angel are both soft to Path and Venser, Angel in particular is also soft to Assassin's Trophy and so should likely be boarded out. Sundering Titan is excellent against their greedy manabase and as usual will be crippling for them to remove. Karn is good as a tutor for Sundering Titan and other big Tron cards, since any prison artifacts like Bridge are soft to Trophy and Venser. Ugin is as good as he can be here; they need a board presence for their deck to do anything and Ugin denies them this.

Tips and tricks:

- Removing creatures in response to Ephemerate is a good value play.
- Soulherder is soft to all our removal and should be the priority target over the value creatures.
- Since their card advantage is really strong, it's usually acceptable to mulligan towards a fast completion of Tron and just play bigger spells.

Good Cards:

- Ugin, the Spirit Dragon
- Sundering Titan
- Spatial Contortion
- Dismember
- Chalice of the Void

Bad Cards:

- Platinum Angel

## PONZA

Favourability:	Telltale Cards:	Telltale Lands:
Average	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Arbor Elf</li><li>- Utopia Sprawl</li><li>- Bloodbraid Elf</li><li>- Pillage</li><li>- Blood Moon</li><li>- Bonecrusher Giant</li><li>- Klothys, God of Destiny</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Wooded Foothills</li><li>- Stomping Ground</li></ul>
Archetype: Proactive, Redundant		

Ponza is Modern's midrange land destruction deck. The idea is to use Arbor Elf and Utopia Sprawl to power out early Blood Moons, Bloodbraid Elves and Klothys to attack its opponent's manabase whilst playing aggressive value threats that apply immense and continuous pressure on the opponent.

Ponza's only scary cards cost 3 mana and above, however they will always get to play a 3-drop on turn 2. The inclusion of 4 Arbor Elves and 4 Utopia Sprawls mean they will always have their ramp online, and destroying our lands or landing an early Bloodbraid is bad news for us. For this reason, this matchup is largely dependent on two things; if we are on the play, or if their first piece of land hate is Blood Moon over a Bloodbraid/Klothys. If we're on the play, we get to 2 lands before they can destroy things or land some pressure and can just use our counterspells to stop them doing anything dangerous, then run the normal idea of progressing our gameplan until we land Wurmcoil, which can usually win by itself. If they run Blood Moon, we can just ignore it and enjoy the fact that we can now get our counterspells underneath whatever they plan to play next.

If these dependencies don't hold up, then it's a much tougher match. Usually they can either destroy one of our lands and win with tempo threats, or just lean on Klothys and Bloodbraid Elf pressure to overwhelm our strategy of trying to control the game. In this case it's acceptable to try and counter a Blood Moon and race to Tron, hoping to just land a Wurmcoil or Ugin and stop them in their tracks.

Our threats are all at least good. As it usually is against these types of midrange decks, Wurmcoil is the best of the bunch here, as they have no decent way of removing it and it races or trades extremely favourably with all their threats. Ugin exiles their whole board. Angel is strong if you untap with it, since Pillage is your only real worry. Oblivion Stone shines here to knock out their mana advantage of Utopia Sprawl and Arbor Elf, often leaving them with a few Forests and nothing to do. Karn is likely not going to survive more than a single turn but forms a useful plan of getting a Wurmcoil Engine as follow-up play.

Chalice of the Void is distinctly average. Although it stops a number of important cards (Elf, Sprawl), these have often come down before Chalice and already done their job. If you're later in the game, their Elves and Sprawls are redundant cards anyway, so the Chalice is still not blanking anything of importance and is destroyed by Pillage. It's worth perhaps keeping in one post-board, but Chalice ranks low over other sideboard choices, like more countermagic. Ensnaring Bridge is also average, as it doesn't stop Klothys damage and is also soft to Pillage.

Since the matchup is very dependent on who plays first, Gemstone Caverns is a big help and worth boarding in.

Tips and tricks:

- Utopia Sprawl reads 'Enchant Forest'. Spreading Seas on their Utopia'd lands causes all the enchantments to fall off. This is also worth pointing out to an inexperienced player if they play Blood Moon and have Sprawls on Stomping Ground.
- On the draw, you can mulligan slightly more aggressively towards Gemstone Caverns and counterspells.
- Unless it's about to take you off blue or our only option is Tron, don't waste a counterspell on Blood Moon.

Good Cards:

- Wurmcoil Engine
- Gemstone Caverns
- Crucible of Worlds
- Spreading Seas
- Counterspells

Bad Cards:

- Chalice of the Void
- Spatial Contortion

## DEATH AND TAXES

Favourability:

Average

Archetype:

Proactive, Redundant

Telltale Cards:

- Thoughtseize
- Inquisition of Kozilek
- Thalia, Guardian of Thraben
- Leonin Arbiter
- Aether Vial

Telltale Lands:

- Caves of Koilos
- Concealed Courtyard
- Ghost Quarter
- Eldrazi Temple
- Shambling Vent

Death and Taxes is a midrange deck that plays a suite of 'hatebears'; small creatures that apply some form of restriction to both players. These can be in the form of 'taxes' on Thalia, Guardian of Thraben, speedbumps on Thalia, Heretic Cathar, or restrictions on certain aspects of play, like Leonin Arbiter and Aven Mindcensor. The idea of the deck is that these restrictions hurt the opposing player much more than the Taxes player, and this combined with good removal, hand disruption and clocks let them crumble their opponent's gameplan and beat them to death with creatures, or use Stoneforge Mystic to throw sword triggers at you.

There are a few different types of Taxes decks, and while all of them have the same basic plan, they differ enough to warrant a mention here:

- Mono White Taxes: Trades the removal and hand disruption black offers for increased consistency and the chance to play a wider variety of taxation effects.
- BW Taxes: The classic build, utilising the best disruption the two colours have to offer, with a good suite of removal.
- Eldrazi and Taxes: Comes in both W&B and BW&B colour combinations. This deck trades away consistency for the ability to be more aggressive and increase pressure with the Eldrazi from Oath of the Gatewatch.

All the Taxes decks have reasonable game against us, simply because their disruption effects are relevant. Thalia, Guardian of Thraben stops us playing spells effectively, Path to Exile gets rid of our best creature, Stoneforge Mystic is a cheap and must-answer threat, and the torrent of discard takes away our answers to the low cost beaters. Aether Vial is also good as a way to get around our counters, and the Eldrazi versions sometimes run a singleton Cavern of Souls, which needs no introduction as something our deck doesn't enjoy seeing.

Despite this, we do have some ways of fighting. If we can get under their first few creatures, then we can play our gameplan normally and use our spells in an effective way before Aether Vial starts to get their gameplan into action anyway. They also have no real way of interacting with our lands outside of Ghost Quarter, so getting to Tron early lets us play big threats that just go over their incrementally disruptive style of playing.

Our removal is usually as good an avenue of interaction than our counters, as they need creatures on the field to do anything. Spatial and Dismember should be what you're looking to draw for most of the early turns here, and Dismember is especially good being only 1 mana, as this makes Thalia's tax easier to deal with. Just watch out for their flickering effects, as these can really swing a game if they get to save their creature and fizzle your precious removal spell with a single card.

Chalice is good mostly to protect Wurmcoil against Path to Exile, but can be blanked with Flickerwisp. If you can protect the Chalice, Wurmcoil becomes a really strong threat and completely counters their win condition of slowly beating you to death. Our best stabiliser, however, is Ugin, who just eats their whole board and does so without losing too many loyalty counters. Oblivion Stone is equally good, and will also work against the Eldrazi in that version of the deck, which would otherwise still be around after Ugin has ticked down.

Another good line of play is to try and reduce how much their taxation effects hurt us, by aiming to play Treasure Mage, Solemn Simulacrum into Gearhulk and Wurmcoil. Nothing they have taxes you playing creatures and your 2/2s are relevant blockers against their small guys. This plan is only really hampered by Leonin Arbiter.

This is probably the only matchup in which it's acceptable to board out Expedition Map in the face of Arbiter's tax.

Tips and tricks:

- The Eldrazi and Taxes versions are quite inconsistent, and taking just a few of their threats away can give you a good amount of time whilst they fumble around finding more.
- You can't pay for Leonin Arbiter whilst an effect is resolving, so do it in response to them activating Ghost Quarter or casting Path.
- Batterskull is best answered by Repeal on X=0.
- Karn will prevent Stoneforge Mystic from doing anything meaningful.

Good Cards:

- Wurmcoil Engine
- Dismember
- Spatial Contortion
- Ugin, the Spirit Dragon
- Oblivion Stone

Bad Cards:

- Expedition Map

## CONTROL DECKS

Control decks are generally the matchups that require you to think ahead the most, since the games are going to go on a long time. The usual axes the matches rotate on are card advantage and clocks. As we are very good at the first of these, we should try and steer the game into a state where the opponent is forced to find a clock or drown in our card advantage and inevitability with Mindslaver lock. Control decks rarely do well at playing proactively, and we can use this to get value counterspells in on their turns and use our remaining lands to advance our gameplan.

### UGX CONTROL

Favourability:	Telltale Cards:	Telltale Lands:
Average		
Archetype:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Uro, Titan of Nature's Wrath</li><li>- Jace, the Mind Sculptor</li><li>- Teferi, Hero of Dominaria</li><li>- Cryptic Command</li><li>- Teferi, Time Raveler</li><li>- Wilderness Reclamation</li><li>- Growth Spiral</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Hallowed Fountain</li><li>- Breeding Pool</li><li>- Field of the Dead</li><li>- Castle Vantress</li><li>- Mystic Sanctuary</li></ul>

UGx Control covers a wide scope of draw-go control decks. The majority are piles based around Uro, Titan of Nature's Wrath and Mystic Sanctuary, since these are simply objectively better than anything else you are doing in the value-pile camp. Variants within these are:

- Wilderness Reclamation decks (both Temur and Sultai): Decks that aim to use Wilderness Reclamation to allow them to gain mana advantage, never tap out and chain Nexus of Fate casts combined with Uro attacks, Field zombies or planeswalker activations to drown in value.
- Uro Control/Pile (Bant, Sultai, Temur): A pile of good 2019+ cards based around Uro. All the cards are borderline broken and putting them in a vaguely synergistic pile is a good way to carry yourself through a tournament.
- UW Control: The original Ux control deck, using the best spells in Blue and White without the tax of a three colour manabase. Can also run Stoneforge Mystic to be more aggressive.

Sadly, thanks to Wizard's recent policy of printing cards that are insanely good by themselves and/or all cantrip, we are no longer favoured against control piles. Almost every card in the UGx decks replaces itself the moment it resolves and generates further value if allowed to remain on the board. Their win conditions are either recursive (Uro, Nexus) or completely free and impossible to effectively interact with (Field of the Dead). Their graveyard is a second hand thanks to Mystic Sanctuary and they still run the 'cannot-resolve' suite of planeswalkers in T3feri, Jace and Wrenn and Six. Overall, they have the upper hand with card advantage and interaction, and so we have to win on threats.

This is one of the rare matchups where we have to play as the aggressor. We cannot afford to let their innate insane card advantage climb over us to the point where we cannot commit anything to the board no matter how much mana we have and they are defending an escaped Uro. To this end, our best cards are Thought-Knot Seer, Walking

Ballista, Karn and the all-star Sundering Titan. If you run any Eldrazi titans, these will also be excellent here to at least force through cast triggers. Cavern of Souls out of the board is extremely useful.

Our switch to being aggressive does not mean we rashly run our threats into counterspells. Try and get them to tap out at the end of their turn by using Thirst for Knowledge or Fact or Fiction and then cast something that doesn't get stopped by Force of Negation. Running them out of cards in the mid game and getting them in topdeck mode is also a good strategy, and can be accomplished by making them use their Forces in response to a fast completion of Tron. Their manabase doesn't allow them to run more than 1 or 2 Field of Ruin, and so our Tron completion is usually safer and is a good way to gain a concrete advantage over their value engines.

Stoneforge Mystic is a strong aggressive option against us, since on the play it can come down earlier than our counterspells and we don't run a reliable density of removal to be sure we can destroy it on sight. Luckily however, it takes a few turns before it is ready to swing with a sword attached, and we have a really good answer to Batterskull in the form of Repeal. Karn also shuts off the Stoneforge payoff cards with his static.

Sundering Titan is probably the best threat we have. The weakness of these decks is their incredibly greedy manabases and often they will stumble over colours and be unable to escape Uro or cast Cryptic Command, or be forced to play out taplands like Field of the Dead or an early Mystic Sanctuary. This is where we can use Tron or Talisman ramp to slam Karns and Thought-Knots and force them to expend cards to Force of Negation or just steal their remaining counters with TKS. It is possible to get them out of interaction this way and get to a resolved Sundering Titan. This card completely takes over the game; it is bigger than all their threats and destroys their already fragile manabase. You should likely prioritise taking them off green or double blue if possible, as the value of an escaped Uro is tough for us to deal with.

Chalice of the Void is pretty much always played on 1, however its utility is pretty low. It blanks Path to Exile and some cantrips, but the cards that win the game simply don't care. Mazemind Tome is a much better turn 2 play, as it allows you to keep pace with their card draw and push towards Tron or a greater density of threats. Graveyard hate is extremely good against both Uro and Mystic Sanctuary, and will stall a good portion of the basis for these decks and allow you to right more effectively on the card advantage front. If your meta is a ton of variants of these decks, consider sideboarding in a Narset, Parter of Veils to stop their card draw.

Tips and tricks:

- If your non-critical spell is countered, Remand your spell, not theirs. You'll gain 1 card's worth of advantage and this will usually matter more than getting a threat down right then, especially if you can fizz a Cryptic Command.
- Field of Ruin can be used to make their manabase even more strained, but should likely be saved for Field of the Dead.

Good Cards:

- Walking Ballista
- Sundering Titan
- Thought-Knot Seer
- Karn, the Great Creator

Bad Cards:

- Platinum Angel

## 8-RACK

Favourability:	Telltale Cards:	Telltale Lands:
Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The Rack</li><li>- Shrieking Affliction</li><li>- Smallpox</li><li>- Raven's Crime</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Urborg, Tomb of Yawgmoth</li><li>- Mutavault</li></ul>
Archetype: Proactive, Redundant		

8-Rack is a pure discard deck, aiming to rid both players of their hands as quickly as it can, and win by naming their opponent with one of their 8 'rack' effects; The Rack and Shrieking Affliction. The deck controls the board with Smallpox, Ensnaring Bridge, Liliana of the Veil and has additional beats and blocker value from Mutavault, whilst being able to draw cards with Castle Locthwain.

8-Rack is a good matchup for us, as their clock is slow and so we have a fair chance to gain back card with our draw spells and our stabilisers all line up well with their idea of slow repeated damage. Whilst we are weak to torrents of targeted discard, 8-Rack doesn't reliably back it up with fast enough threats like Tarmogoyf or Death's Shadow to capitalise on us being crippled for a short while. We should have enough time to draw any of our card advantage spells or a stabiliser, and these cards give us a great chance of coming back into the game.

Chalice of the Void is particularly strong here, as it blocks 25-30 of their discard spells, but crucially their main win conditions in both Rack effects. If we get a Chalice down before a rack effect, then we have only Liliana, Smallpox and Mutavault to worry about, all of which we're in good shape to deal with.

Our stabilisers are all strong threats. Wurmcoil is probably the best for the cost here, as the discard often stops us getting to more than 6 mana. Wurmcoil is tough for them to remove and mitigates the life loss from their rack effects. Ugin can -1 to clear away Shrieking Afflictions, but is best used to tick up toward his ultimate, which is clearly very powerful against 8-Rack. Mindslaver by itself is somewhat lacking in this matchup, as without the lock we can't do much apart from waste any discard spells on themselves or tick down Lilianas against their Mutavaults. Karn is excellent, as they only really have Mutavault to remove it, and it can allow us to continue to dig for cards to offset the discard effects. Our boardwipes are very useful here, especially Engineered Explosives hitting all their rack effects. If you can fire off EE then get a Chalice down you're usually in excellent shape and have a lot of time to rebuild your hand.

Tips and tricks:

- Bouncing Liliana in response to her tick up causes them to have to discard it if they're otherwise hellbent.
- Oboro has decent use here to keep you at over three cards in your hand when the rack effects trigger in your upkeep. Apart from that, you can keep lands and any useless cards in your hand to take less damage.

Good Cards:

- Chalice of the Void
- Thirst for Knowledge
- Engineered Explosives
- Wurmcoil Engine
- Karn, the Great Creator

Bad Cards:

- Dismember

## BLUE MOON

Favourability:	Telltale Cards:	Telltale Lands:
Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Blood Moon</li><li>- Vendilion Clique</li><li>- Brazen Borrower</li><li>- Cryptic Command</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Desolate Lighthouse</li><li>- Steam Vents</li><li>- Sulfur Falls</li></ul>
<u>Archetype:</u> Reactive, Redundant/Essential (if Through the Breach)		

Blue Moon is the most common name for a family of UR control/tempo decks that seek to use a less greedy manabase and mainboard Blood Moon to cause the opponent to trip over their own lands and give the Moon player an easier ride when controlling the game. The deck plays of blue control cards in Cryptic Command, Remand, Opt, Jace, the Mind Sculptor and Mana Leak as well as some burn spells to control the board long enough for Brazen Borrowers or Vendilion Cliques to push through the final damage. Some variants include more dig and a Through the Breach/Emrakul, the Aeons Torn package to snap wins out of nowhere.

As our deck isn't worried about Blood Moon in the early game, we have a good matchup here. Our counterspells and supreme card advantage line up well against their cards, and as we push them to the late game we should have ample opportunity to remove Blood Moon and immediately spring our mana advantage online too, quickly allowing us to win the game.

All our interaction is good, even our removal against their tempo creatures, which when played aggressively with backup is their best chance of winning. Spatial Contortion can be blanked by Blood Moon, so use it as quickly as you can against anything they drop early. Chalice is great on 1, blocking a good number of their cantrips and Lightning Bolt.

All our threats apart from Angel are good, as they maindeck artifact removal in Abrade. Wurmcoil is difficult for them to kill, but they have ways of bouncing it with Thing in the Ice, Jace and Cryptic Command. A resolved Ugin is very tough for them to stop, and will likely trade very well even if they do kill him, taking out their threats and a Moon on the board and then eating some burn spells to gain card advantage. Karn is excellent to accrue value here and also fetch bridge to stop Emrakul if it comes to that. Mindslayer is usually the best thing we can do, as their interaction and burn can be wasted on themselves and we can usually just empty their hand.

If they're playing the Through the Breach package, the game gets slightly more difficult, as you have to try and gain card advantage whilst always having as much interaction up as possible. They have good ways of protecting their combo with Dispel, Remand and Vendilion Clique to take your interaction, so it's worth playing this matchup as a combo deck more than a control deck. A few variants run Simian Spirit Guides to power out the combo earlier, and these should be considered when choosing the X for Condescend. We can deal with Emrakul with Oblivion Stone, and Ensnaring Bridge or an overloaded Cyclonic Rift, but it's always better if she doesn't land.

Tips and tricks:

- Punish them for tapping out in their turn for Blood Moon by casting Thirsts and Fact or Fiction. Card advantage matters way more here and since they don't run Uro or the UW planeswalker suite we should win on this front.

## Good Cards:

- Chalice of the Void
- Thirst for Knowledge
- Ugin, the Spirit Dragon
- Fact or Fiction
- Karn, the Great Creator

## Bad Cards:

- Platinum Angel
- Spatial Contortion
- Thought-Knot Seer

## MONO RED PRISON

### Favourability:

Very Good

### Archetype:

Proactive, Redundant

### Telltale Cards:

- Chalice of the Void
- Ensnaring Bridge
- Blood Moon
- Simian Spirit Guide
- Karn, the Great Creator

### Telltale Lands:

- Gemstone Caverns
- Ramunap Ruins

Welcome to what is possibly our best matchup. Mono Red Prison is a deck that wants to sacrifice card advantage to accelerate out a number of Modern-relevant prison cards, then capitalise on their delayed or crippled opponent to have a free reign with planeswalkers or Goblin Rabblemaster. As can be imagined, the success of the strategy revolves around how good your prison cards are against the deck you're playing. Here, Mono Red Prison uses good choices in Chalice of the Void, Blood Moon and Ensnaring Bridge. These cards, when landing on turns 1 and 2, can be an enormous speedbump to a wide range of Modern decks, and when backed up on turn 3 or 4 with a good clock like Rabblemaster, Koth or Chandra, form a ticket to a quick victory. A quick stumbling block backed up by a fast clock is usually a good way to stop us too, so why is this such a good matchup?

Because their prison cards are all completely useless against us. In order:

- Chalice of the Void – we run it too,
- Ensnaring Bridge – we run it too in the board and we can Repeal it if it ever becomes a problem,
- Blood Moon – the most relevant card they run, but see [Blood Moon](#).

A typical opener from Mono Red Prison sees them play a land, then use a ritual or couple of Simian Spirit Guides to get one of these cards down turn 1. Here, they've given us a 2/3 for 1 and played something we don't really care about. We are in a good position now to play our lands and start countering their actual threats (the planeswalkers and Rabblemaster) a few turns later. After a short while, this initial card disadvantage catches up with them and they run out of cards, giving us free reign to take over the game.

Their only real way of making us sweat is to use the Guides to get a threat out early as opposed to a lock piece. A turn one Rabblemaster is going to really hurt unless we have Dismember or Spatial ready to go. Thankfully, most pilots prioritise the Blood Moon part of their deck's main strategy as soon as they see a Tronland.

All our interaction is live, and all our stabilisers are great. Angel is probably the weakest, since they have artifact removal mainboard. As usual, Wurmcoil is probably the strongest for cost since they just can't remove it smoothly,

especially if they've already sacrificed card advantage in the first few turns. Karn is excellent to both get us a Wurmcoil and also stop their Karns from doing anything dangerous with Liquimetal Coating. Mindslaver is fun to waste their rituals and Simian Spirit Guides and turn their planeswalkers on themselves. In general, this deck feels like something ours was specifically constructed to beat.

Tips and tricks:

- Be careful of Simian Spirit Guide when playing Condescends, it's usually correct to overpay if you can.
- Some builds run Hazoret the Fervent, who can be a pain if he lands but lines up nicely with Dismember.

Good Cards:

- Counterspells
- Dismember
- Thirst for Knowledge
- Wurmcoil Engine

Bad Cards:

- Platinum Angel
- Thought-Knot Seer

## MONO U TRON

Favourability:

Average

Archetype:

Reactive, Redundant

Telltale Cards:

- Remand
- Condescend
- Expedition Map
- Thirst for Knowledge

Telltale Lands:

- Tronlands
- Oboro, Palace in the Clouds
- Island
- Academy Ruins

Oh boy. This subsection will be fairly short, as hopefully from the rest of this primer it's fairly apparent how this works. Essentially, there are three main paths to victory for each player, assuming their builds are similar:

- Cast more Thirst for Knowledges than your opponent.
- Get to Tron earlier than your opponent.
- Start beating down with an early Mage or Thought-Knot Seer and force them to make the first move.

At a high level, these translate into getting either card or mana advantage over your opponent, or presenting them with a clock. Generally, whoever accomplishes one of these strategies first will put themselves in a strong position, and force their opponent to do something to prevent them being dead or outclassed in the endgame. However, the way of pushing these advantages is somewhat different.

If you get to resolve a few Thirsts, you want to start trading 1 for 1 and have the game go on for a long time. This is probably the easiest way to victory, as both decks are built to do this anyway. Card advantage, as it usually does, matters a lot in control matchups. If you get to an early Tron, then start piling on the pressure and see if you can force through a big card like Wurmcoil, Karn or Gearhulk. If you manage to land an early beater, you should either do what you can to protect it and force it through for the win or make them tap badly to remove it. This is a similarly aggressive plan to what goes on in option 2, but is here if you want to play aggressively without Tron. This does risk your opponent getting to Tron first and playing something bigger.

Our stabilisers are usually just ways of pressuring. Ugin and Wurmcoil are good here, however Angel is hard for our deck to remove so can be a good option to protect and beat down with. Karn is fantastic, and you're almost always going for Liquimetal Coating to just start eating their lands (starting with blue sources unless they have Tron). Thought-Knot Seer is a great clock if you can get it to land, since you can likely take any card that can get it off the board. Mindslaver is very, very strong, as not only is your opponent playing an interactive deck, they're playing *your* interactive deck, so you should know how best to cripple whatever they've got going on. A single Mindslaver activation is usually goodbye. Clearly, Chalice of the Void should be boarded out.

Tips and tricks:

- Thirst is probably the most key card in the deck, and is the best way to punish your opponent if you have mana left at the end of their turn and they've tapped out.

Good Cards:

- Counterspells
- Thirst for Knowledge
- Mindslaver
- Karn, the Great Creator
- Thought-Knot Seer

Bad Cards:

- Dismember
- Spatial Contortion
- Chalice of the Void

## COMBO DECKS

Combo decks are a good matchup for us. They usually don't do anything threatening for the first few turns, and allow us to sculpt our hand into a wall of counterspells for when they try and force through a win. Our difficulty in these matchups comes from balancing this wall with applying pressure, and getting to Tron can really help here to allow us to do both in the same turn. You very rarely want to drop your shields against decks than can win out of nowhere.

## AD NAUSEAM

Favourability:

Good

Archetype:

Proactive, Essential

Telltale Cards:

- Lotus Bloom
- Pentad Prism
- Phyrexian Unlife
- Ad Nauseam
- Angel's Grace
- Thassa's Oracle

Telltale Lands:

- City of Brass
- Temple of Deceit
- Temple of Enlightenment

Ad Nauseam is an all in combo deck; their only real way to win is to cast Ad Nauseam. When they do, they'll use it to draw their entire deck with one of their 'can't lose the game this turn' effects in play, and use either Lightning Storm, Thassa's Oracle or Laboratory Maniac to win the game right there with their entire deck in their hand. These win conditions are very different:

- Lightning Storm: After they've drawn everything, they discard three copies of Simian Spirit Guide to cast Lightning Storm. Since they have their entire deck in their hand the chances are they'll be able to discard enough lands to ensure you take lethal damage.
- Casting Thassa's Oracle with no cards in your library wins you the game on the spot. This is probably their best win condition as it costs the least mana.
- Laboratory Maniac: this is their backup win condition. It's more fragile than the other two since both the Maniac and their 'can't lose the game' condition have to survive until their next draw step. Often they'll try this wincon in their upkeep so that Angel's Grace can be used effectively.

They have two main 'can't lose the game' effects. One is Angel's Grace, which is fairly resilient with split second but only works for that turn. The other is Phyrexian Unlife, which allows them to stay alive even after Ad Nauseam has taken their life total far into the negatives. They also have Pact of Negation to force through their combo, Spoils of the Vault to find their combo pieces, and mana acceleration from Pentad Prism and Lotus Bloom to fix colours and get their combo going off faster.

Our deck is well positioned to interact with their combo. Apart from the obvious lines of repeatedly countering Ad Nauseam, we have Chalice to stop a lot of their key cards, and bounce spells to interact with Phyrexian Unlife and reset their mana acceleration cards. Chalice is best played on either 0 or 1; 0 stops Pact of Negation and also any suspended Lotus Blooms, and 1 stops Angel's Grace and Spoils of the Vault along with about 8 other cantrips. Whilst Chalice on 1 stops more cards, it's recommended to put Chalice on 0 to stop Pact, which gives them free wins against your counterspells. You need your counterspells to be live to stop a combo deck.

Karn, the Great Creator is fantastic at slowing them right down by turning off all their ramp artifacts. Pentad Prism and Lotus Bloom have no text on them while Karn is on the field. They also cannot threaten Karn, so we can aggressively get a Liquimetal Coating to start taking them off lands in conjunction with stopping their ramp, and sometimes they never get enough mana to cast their namesake card.

Our bounce spells are also excellent if they go for the Phyrexian Unlife plan, since we can bounce this in response to a wincon for a quick victory. We can also use Repeal on their mana acceleration cards, forcing them to either use them to try and combo off in response or to replay them, slowing their game down.

When they try and go off, you'll have a decision to make to counter either Ad Nauseam or wait and try and counter the payoff. The second option is better if it works (since they'll usually lose the game immediately afterwards) however this line depends on them not being able to stop your counterspell with their whole deck in their hand. If it's game 1 and you have a Chalice on 0, then this is probably the best line as they can't use Pact. However if it's post-board they may have brought in other interaction, so fighting over Ad Nauseam itself is a safer bet.

Since Ad Nauseam is a combo deck, our stabilisers are simply there to apply pressure in conjunction with us stopping their combo. Any of our big colourless cards work well here, with special mentions going to Karn for his previously mentioned ability to shut off their artifact ramp, and Platinum Angel, since thy can't kill both it and you with a single Lightning Storm and the other two wincons don't touch her. Wurmcoil Engine can also be good if it connects enough times to get your life total out of reach for Lightning Storm, but if this is the case then you've likely already hit them to death with it.

With the exception of Laboratory Maniac, which is sometime only a sideboard card, our removal is totally useless. Even postboard it should be taken out, as we can rely on our counterspells and bounce to deal with Maniac if it comes in.

Tips and tricks:

- Use bounce spells to delay their mana acceleration early game and draw you cards, but don't bounce Phyrexian Unlife just because you can. It's far better to bounce it after they've killed themselves with Ad Nauseam.
- Ad Nauseam is an instant, so be very careful about tapping out for Thirsts and Maps. They only need 5 mana to go off if they have a Simian Spirit Guide in their hand, or 4 mana if they also have Unlife in play.
- Chalice on 0 is much better than Chalice on 1 despite blocking fewer cards. Them being allowed to dig is much more manageable for us than them being allowed to resolve multiple copies of Pact of Negation and force their combo through whenever they like.
- If they go off with Lightning Storm, remember you can still try and redirect the damage by discarding lands. Some players may also just say 'Lightning storm you?' and if you can get to say 'Lightning Storm resolves' then you have a reasonable argument for only taking 3 damage since they didn't specifically announce holding priority and discarding lands.

Good Cards:

- Counterspells
- Chalice of the Void
- Platinum Angel
- Karn, the Great Creator

Bad Cards:

- Dismember
- Spatial Contortion
- Solemn Simulacrum

## NEOBAND

Favourability:

Average

Archetype:

Proactive, Essential

Telltale Cards:

- Allosaurus Rider
- Chancellor of the Tangle
- Griselbrand
- Eldritch Evolution
- Neoform

Telltale Lands:

- Botanical Sanctum
- Waterlogged Grove

Neobrand is the fastest deck in Modern, when it works. Capable of a turn one kill, the deck goes off by paying the alternate cost for Allosaurus Rider, then using Chancellor and Simian Spirit Guide to cast a quick Neoform or Evolution to turn it into a Griselbrand. From there the deck uses the classic combination of Nourishing Shoal and a big green creature to draw its entire deck and then win with Laboratory Maniac. If the stars align for them, best hope you have Force of Negation.

This matchup is usually over in the first few turns. Either they kill us and there's nothing we can do about it, or we counter their Neoform/Evolution and their strategy dies until the find all the bits of their combo again and we kill them with any form of clock. To this end, our best cards are:

- Dismember, since it's our cheapest way of killing Allosaurus Rider,
- Force of Negation (if you run it),
- Other counterspells (if they don't just have the combo in their opening hand)

The rest of our deck is just used to either prevent them recasting combo pieces after we've stopped the initial attempt and for killing them. Thought-Knot Seer is probably our best clock as it is the cheapest and does both jobs at once. However anything fits the bill here, with a special mention to Platinum Angel for its ability to nullify their win condition and their inability to remove it.

Most of their sideboard cards are methods of stopping interaction, like Pact of Negation, Veil of Summer (some run this in the main) and Hope of Ghirapur. These are worth playing around but against a deck as fast as this, you just have to do what you can and hope they don't have it. Chalice on 0 can help against Pact.

Tips and tricks:

- Kill Allosaurus Rider as fast as you can, as the sacrifice is part of the cost.

Good Cards:

- Counterspells
- Dismember
- Platinum Angel
- Chalice of the Void

Bad Cards:

- Repeal
- Wurmcoil Engine

## STORM

Favourability:

Average/Good

Archetype:

Proactive, Essential

Telltale Cards:

- Baral, Chief of Compliance
- Goblin Electromancer
- Gifts Ungiven
- Desperate Ritual
- Pyretic Ritual

Telltale Lands:

- Spirebluff Canal
- Shivan Reef

Storm is the Modern deck named after one of the oldest combo mechanics in Magic. The keyword allows you to copy the spell you're casting for every spell you've previously cast this turn. Storm decks in all formats are about chaining a bunch of spells then casting something with storm to either win the game or gain a huge advantage.

In Modern, the two spells Storm uses to capitalise on the mechanic are Grapeshot and Empty the Warrens. The first deals 1 damage per copy, and the second makes 2 1/1 Goblin tokens per copy. The deck gets a high storm count by chaining ritual spells (Desperate Ritual, Manamorphose and Pyretic Ritual) along with cantrips (Serum Visions,

Sleight of Hand and Opt) to keep making mana and drawing cards to continue playing more of the same spells. The deck has two cards that compound this effect; Past in Flames to replay everything from the graveyard and Gifts Ungiven to tutor for whatever is needed to continue the combo. The deck also uses four copies of Baral, Chief of Compliance and Goblin Electromancer to make all these spells cost 1 mana less. These creatures are usually run out on turn 2, and will be your first indicator that you're facing Storm.

Our interaction gives us a good matchup against Storm. They usually have to resolve either a Past in Flames or a Gifts Ungiven to win, and even then find it tricky to do so if we can get their cost-saving creatures off the field. These four cards (Gifts, Flames and the two creatures) should therefore be in your sights from the start, as these allow them to develop into a critical mass of cards and mana which stop our counterspells from being effective. To this end, our removal is something that should be kept in, but Spatial is acceptable over Dismember as the creatures are small. Out of the board, Summary Dismissal/Whirlwind Denial and Grafidiggers Cage are all great inclusions; the former can eat a whole stack of storm copies and the latter stops Past in Flames working.

Our best card is Chalice. They run a single Repeal to try and deal with a Chalice on 2, which otherwise completely denies them their gameplan. Chalice on 1 is also strong if you don't have time to get to 4 mana, but generally our plan revolves around delaying them until we can slam Chalice on 2 and protect it against Gifts and Repeal.

Whilst their usual plan is to storm off completely and get 20+ copies of Grapeshot, our deck is quite soft to their backup of casting Empty the Warrens on a relatively low storm count. Even four or five copies of this card form a two or three turn clock that we can only answer with a sweeper or a well-timed Whirlwind Denial or Summary Dismissal. Engineered Explosives is a fairly narrow answer to bring in but could be worth including if you're running the Trinket Mage package to also try and tutor for Chalice. Apart from that, we have Ugin, Oblivion Stone and Cyclonic Rift to deal with the Goblin horde.

Our normal stabilisers are varied in their use. Ugin and Angel are good against the Empty the Warrens plan, and Ugin can get rid of their enabling creatures. Wurmcoil can pressure and get your life total out of reasonable Grapeshot range, and sometimes race the Goblin tokens. Karn is good at getting Chalices and Engineered Explosives for Goblins. Be careful casting the stabilisers, since (as with most combo decks) you really never want to tap out fully unless you're sure they can't kill you next turn.

Tips and tricks:

- Don't counter a storm spell with a normal counter spell, and especially not with a Remand. It'll only counter the first one.
- Similarly, Chalice on 2 will counter the first Grapeshot, but won't trigger on any of the copies since it wasn't cast. Chalice on 2 is still ridiculously strong.
- Use your counters and interaction on their two creatures and two key cards. Let them use cantrips to setup if they want to, it buys time for Chalice on 2.

Good Cards:

- Counterspells
- Chalice of the Void
- Grafidigger's Cage
- Summery Dismissal
- Whirlwind Denial

Bad Cards:

- Dismember
- Solemn Simulacrum

## GXTRON

### Favourability:

Average

### Archetype:

Proactive, Essential

### Telltale Cards:

- Ancient Stirrings
- Chromatic Star
- Chromatic Sphere
- Expedition Map

### Telltale Lands:

- Tronlands
- Grove of the Burnwillows
- Llanowar Wastes

Our linear brother. GxTron uses our favourite lands in an aggressive way as a primary gameplan. Their aim is to assemble the combination of Mine, Power Plant and Tower as quickly as they can and play large colourless haymakers one after the other, relying on the fact that playing a much more powerful card than your opponent every turn is as winning strategy. It usually is; left unchecked Tron gets a Karn Liberated into play on their turn 3, and can be followed up by World Breaker, Ugin, the Spirit Dragon or even Ulamog, the Ceaseless Hunger if the stars align for them. Some builds also run the Karn, the Great Creator package for the ability to apply pressure without Tron.

The majority of their deck is focussed around cantripping and playing land search spells. Their main three ways of finding Tronlands are Sylvan Scrying, Expedition Map and Ancient Stirrings. The latter specifically is a very strong card, allowing them to dig for both Tronlands and threats and is a huge boost to their consistency.

The widely understood recipe for stopping GxTron is to deny them their combo and apply a fast clock. We are fairly well positioned to do the first, but can't really do the second, since we don't have a reliable way of applying fast pressure to our opponent. Our gameplan is therefore focussed around trying to keep them off Tron or from landing any scary threats, whilst building into Mindslaver lock or Karn. To this end, we want to be using Field of Ruin and Spreading Seas out of the board to lock down their lands and our array of counters to try and stop their Karns. We really want to keep them off Tron, as their colourless spells are very powerful and hard for us to deal with if they resolve. The most dangerous threats are World Breaker and Ulamog, as even when countered the cast triggers are free 2-for-1s when they take away our lands.

All our counterspells are great, with special mention going to Summary Dismissal and Whirlwind Denial for their ability to deal with the cast triggers. Our removal is useless, with the possible exception of Dismember if they run lots of Thought-Knot Seers or Spatial if they run Thragtusk, although these can both just be countered. Chalice of the Void on 1 is very good, blanking 16 maindeck cards plus any Nature's Claims or Fatal Pushes they may have in. If you can get them to stumble on their early Tron and get a Chalice down, they'll have a hard time getting back to the combo and your counterspells should allow you to build a wall. In these situations you can usually try to beat down with a Wurmcoil Engine or Thought-Knot Seer. Even Snapcaster or Treasure Mage can win games against them if you can stop them getting back to Tron, and Thought-Knot Seer can be used to take critical search pieces for their combo away.

Karn TGC can be used to turn off their artifact cantrips and Maps, and in conjunction with Liquimetal Coating can shut their lands down as well. A turn 3 Karn into Liquimetal on the play is absolutely devastating and a good thing to mulligan towards if you know the matchup. The rest of our stabilisers are usually just clocks. Wurmcoil's lifegain doesn't mean much against a deck that fights with such enormous threats, and their way of removing it is usually exiling with Karn Liberated, World Breaker or Ulamog, meaning Wurmcoil is usually only good for pressuring them early on if they're stumbling over our interaction. Ugin forms the same role; all their main threats are colourless and so Ugin is simply a clock and a way to draw a bunch of cards with his ultimate. Angel is almost completely

redundant. Mindslaver and Gearhulk are both very useful, the former can win even without Ruins, as we use their power against them to cripple their game, and the latter is another counterspell with a clock attached to it.

Tips and tricks:

- If you have blockers to throw in the way of their Wurmcoil and suspect they have more dangerous threats, don't waste a precious counter on it. Them gaining life is irrelevant.
- Use Repeal to move your Spreading Seas around if they start playing multiples of the same Tronland.
- Mulliganning aggressively to Tron and Karn TGC on the play is a viable strategy.

Good Cards:

- Counterspells
- Chalice of the Void
- Field of Ruin
- Mindslaver
- Karn, the Great Creator

Bad Cards:

- Dismember
- Solemn Simulacrum
- Spatial Contortion
- Platinum Angel
- Ugin, the Spirit Dragon

## AMULET TITAN

Favourability:

Average/Good

Archetype:

Proactive, Essential

Telltale Cards:

- Dryad of the Ilyrian Grove
- Amulet of Vigor
- Sakura Tribe-Elder
- Primeval Titan

Telltale Lands:

- Valakut, the Molten Pinnacle
- Simic Growth Chamber
- Castle Garenbrig
- Field of the Dead
- Golgari Rot Farm
- Gruul Turf

The few variants of Amulet Titan all have the high level aim of use Primeval Titan to do broken things with lands. The wincons are usually:

- Having a Dryad of the Ilyrian Grove in play and searching for two Valakuts, usually resulting in a game-ending amount of damage,
- Tutoring for Hanweir Battlements to give the Titan haste and continue tutoring lands,
- Finding multiple Field of the Dead and creating a ton of zombies.

Even without instantly winning a resolved Titan can tutor for a number of utility lands to help the Amulet player gain advantage. Their land-base runs Tolaria West, Blast Zone, Field of Ruin and other utility lands to allow them to interact effectively against the opponent. They also run Karn, the Great Creator simply because they are able to generate lots of mana.

Conventional Titan decks used Search for Tomorrow, Farseek and Sakura Tribe-Elder to ramp into Titan, however Amulet of Vigor in conjunction with the Ravnica bouncelands and a way of playing multiple lands per turn allows the Titan player to make large amount of mana as early as turn 2/3. Dryad of the Ilyrian grove especially does the job of

both allowing additional land drops and allowing Valakut to count all their lands (including itself) as Mountains to pull off the classic Scapeshift kill.

The deck is largely trying to pull off its combo as soon as it can, which although can be very quick we are in a good position to stop. They do however have strong backup plans in both Karn and just ramping into their threatening lands, and interaction denial in Pact of Negation, Cavern of Souls and Veil of Summer out of the board to force the combo through.

Playing against Titan requires us to lean on counterspells, Thought-Knot Seer, Chalice on 0 and win with Sundering Titan. The only ramp spell worth countering is Dryad, but even this is sketchy as it dies to our otherwise useless removal and whilst on the battlefield allows us to end the game with Sundering Titan. Apart from that, you should aim to run them out of Titans and apply pressure before they can either naturally start bolting you with lands or making zombies. We do this by playing Chalice on 0 to block both their Pacts, and get Titans out of their hand with Thought-Knot Seer and countermagic. Field of Ruin is also useful to stop them trying the backup plan of killing us with natural land drops.

Sundering Titan is the clear choice for our stabilisers. With a Dryad in play this destroys 5 lands, which is pretty much always game over. Wurmcoil Engine sounds good to block Primeval Titan, but if they've got to a stage where they've been able to play and attack with it the game is likely going too badly for 6 life to matter. Angel is exceptional against all but the Valakut kill, as they have difficulty removing it. Karn is good at finding lock pieces in Torpor Orb, Ensnaring Bridge and Chalice, and can start taking out lands if dropped early with Liquimetal. Ugin is usually just a wincon, as he's not very good at stopping our opponent casting combo pieces. Mindslaver has the potential to just win if we can kill them with their own Valakuts.

Tips and tricks:

- If you run Tectonic Edge, you can take out their sixth Mountain in response to a bunch of Valakut triggers after they've resolved a payoff card. The triggers will then resolve, check their lands and only see 4 'other' Mountains for each trigger, and you're only taking damage from the triggers belonging to the Mountain you killed.
- If you Mindslaver them, only play out their combo if you know you can kill them. Getting them to 1 life but not being able to close the game is not good if they're now left with Valakuts and a Primetime on the field when they get back control. If you can't kill them, you can at least use a Scapeshift (if they run it) to sacrifice all their lands and then 'fail to find' any with the search. Be sure to scream wildly about how the opponent is a scrub as you do this.
- Karn can plus an Amulet to allow us to kill it with removal, but this is often worse than just getting a relevant lock piece.

Good Cards:

- Counterspells
- Field of Ruin
- Sundering Titan
- Spreading Seas
- Chalice of the Void
- Thought-Knot Seer

Bad Cards:

- Spatial Contortion

## GOBLINS

### Favourability:

Good

### Archetype:

Proactive, Essential with Redundant backup

### Telltale Cards:

- Conspicuous Snoop
- Goblin Matron
- Boggart Harbinger
- Kiki-Jiki, Mirror Breaker
- Aether Vial

### Telltale Lands:

- Auntie's Hovel
- Cavern of Souls (Goblins)

Goblins is primarily a combo deck with an aggressive backup plan. The primary win condition is the combo of Conspicuous Snoop and Boggart Harbinger, putting Kiki-Jiki on top of their library for Snoop to copy itself a bunch of times for a lethal swing with infinite Goblins. The rest of the deck is designed to both assist in tutoring up this combo and provide a backup tribal midrangey-aggro plan by making a large number of cheap Goblins and tokens and attacking for victory.

As Goblins sacrifices the more aggressive side of its previous iterations for the Snoop combo, this matchup is slightly favoured for us. We have enough interaction to stop them comboing off and without that the majority of their creatures boil down to 3 mana 1/1s, which is too slow of an aggressive plan to kill us before we can stabilise. As the setup for their combo (without Vial) is all at sorcery speed, we should be able to use Thirsts to continue finding our interaction, and even leaving a single mana open for Dismember should be sufficient to be sure they can't combo off after you've almost tapped out for a stabiliser.

Focus on getting Snoop off the board, as it's the centrepiece of their combo. If you can get both Kiki-Jikis into their hand or graveyard you no longer have to worry about the combo and can just play the standard defensive plan. Even Field of Ruin can be used to force a shuffle in response to them attempting to combo off. Failing that all our removal is live and our counterspells and bounce spells all serve to ensure they don't get to keep a Snoop on the field. Chalice is best boarded out, as they have a wide CMC spread and they can get around it with Vial and Cavern.

All our stabilisers are good. Ugin is the best of the bunch here, as he just keeps the board completely empty. Karn can get Needle effects to name Conspicuous Snoop as well as Ballista as additional removal, and he stops Vial. Wurmcoil Engine is good as a finisher to completely deny them the aggro plan once you're in a position in which they aren't likely to combo off. They can kill Angel with Munitions Expert, so be wary of them building up a larger board presence if you're relying on Angel to protect you against the combo.

### Tips and tricks:

- Just focus on removing Snoop. Their aggro plan isn't very scary.

### Good Cards:

- Repeal
- Spatial Contortion
- Dismember
- Walking Ballista
- Ugin, the Spirit Dragon

### Bad Cards:

- Chalice of the Void

## WHIRZA VARIANTS

Favourability:	Telltale Cards:	Telltale Lands:
Good	- Urza, Lord High Artificer - Thoptor Foundry - Sword of the Meek - -Emry, Lurker of the Loch - Witching Well - Whir of Invention	- Inventor's Fair - Buried Ruin
Archetype: Proactive with reactive elements, Essential		

Whirza decks are variants of trying to win with the combo of Thoptor Foundry and Sword of the Meek. Together, these cards read: 1: Make a 1/1 Flying Thoptor and gain 1 life. This is a powerful engine in itself, but with the introduction of Urza (allowing Sword of the Meek to tap for U) this combo immediately goes off, generating:

- Infinite 1/1 Flyers,
- Infinite blue mana (each Thoptor taps with Urza),
- Infinite life,
- An Infinity/Infinity size Construct token,
- The ability to use the mana and Urza's last ability to wheel their entire deck into play at instant speed.

Needless to say, if the combo goes off, the Urza player has won. Granted, they now have to get through another turn to be able to attack with their army, but being at infinite life with the ability to wheel Cryptic Commands out of their deck for free tends to get you there. Some variants run a single copy of Time Sieve in the main to allow them to definitely win the turn they finish the combo, and almost all builds run some number of Whir of Invention to tutor up the combo parts at instant speed.

Urza decks come in a few variants:

- Grix Urza – following on from the original builds, this deck is all-in on the combo and plays a Goblin Engineer and a lot more prison artifact pieces. This should be treated as a pure combo deck.
- Dimir Whirza – A midrange/control deck that uses common blue and black control spells with Whir to find the combo at a slower pace whilst playing a midrange game. Treat as a midrange deck with the combo as the main wincon.
- Urzablade – a deck in Azorius colours that utilises the various synergies between the Urza combo and the Stoneforge package, rounded out with the usual UW control cards and T3feri. Treat this as a Stoneblade control deck with the combo as another wincon.
- Uroza – an Uro-based Bant control pile that just happens to have Urza included as another 'good 2019+ card'. Usually also runs a couple of Whirs for the combo but sometimes Foundry and Sword are omitted in favour of just playing more goodstuff. Treat just as a UGx deck with the combo as another threat.

The difficulty in playing this matchup comes from the vastly different way these decks will play. All of them (with the possible exception of Uroza) should be treated primarily as a combo deck, since that's the most dangerous thing they can do, but the value game has to be respected against Dimir, Urzablade and Uroza, as these decks are perfectly capable of winning without putting the combo together and can punish you this way for tunnel-visioning on the pieces.

Our best card against the combo is usually Karn, since his static simply stops it from working and especially against the Grix variants can turn off a lot of the other elements of the deck as well. Unless you're sure of his survival, Karn should always be ticked up, as his static is very often far more valuable than whatever hate piece you could grab from the board. Failing Karn, the combo is hampered by graveyard hate and Pithing Needle effects on Foundry.

The rest of our deck should be spent on fighting the rest of theirs. Most of the other cards in their decks will be the standard control cards in the relevant colours, and our deck should be well equipped to fight on that axis. Urza can be very damaging even unsupported, as it jumps them ahead in mana, comes with another body and can be used for card advantage by wheeling extra cards into play.

Ugin and Sundering Titan are our best stabilisers here, as they both need permanents on the board to win and all variants use greedy manabases. Angel is likely too soft to the controlling aspects of their game and so won't survive the full combo allowing them to wheel their whole deck out to remove her. Mindslaver is excellent if you time it right – you can use the combo to waste their entire deck and then cause them to die to an empty library.

Tips and tricks:

- Protect Karn. He's the best card we have by a long way.
- Graveyard hate is usually very good both against the combo and Sanctuary/Uro/Engineer. Remember that if they have multiple artifacts out they can reactivate the Thoptor Foundry in response to singleton graveyard hate and not lose the combo. Grafidigger's Cage is likely your best bet to prevent this.

Good Cards:

- Karn, the Great Creator
- Grafidigger's Cage

Bad Cards:

- Platinum Angel

## LIVING END

### Favourability:

Very Good

### Archetype:

Proactive, Essential

### Telltale Cards:

- Horror of the Broken Lands
- Monstrous Carabid
- Desert Cerodon
- Demonic Dread
- Violent Outburst
- Living End

### Telltale Lands:

- Blackleave Cliffs
- Grove of the Burnwillows

Living End is Modern's turbo-reanimate deck. Their gameplan is to spend the first few turns cycling creatures, then use one of their cascade spells with otherwise irrelevant effects to cast their namesake card for free, wiping the opponent's board and bringing back all the cyclers. They then use their massive board advantage to hammer their opponent to death.

A key part of Living End's plan is that it restricts them to only playing spells that are CMC 3 or greater, to ensure that their cascade spells definitely hit Living End and not something bad like Fatal Push. For this reason, their go-to removal is Beast Within, which functions well for them; blowing up anything and leaving behind a token that gets eaten by their combo. For us, this means their interaction is much easier for us to counter, however you have to be sure you can still stop their combo if you tap out to counter Beast Within.

Living End is a great matchup for us. We have two effective weapons to stop their combo: counterspells and Chalice of the Void on 0. The latter is fairly easy to use, however with the former all UTron players will make the classic mistake of countering a cascade spell as oppose to the Living End it hits. It'll happen once, and you'll never do it again. The only exception to this rule is countering with Summary Dismissal or Whirlwind Denial, which clear both the cascade card and the trigger.

Chalice on 0 completely stops their deck working, so it's worth protecting. If they're only running Beast Within for removal, you can safely use your counterspells to protect the Chalice knowing they can't do anything scary with it on the field. However some decks still mainboard Ingot Chewer, which is a very good answer for the Chalice and often their only real way of beating us. If the elemental does eat your Chalice, just play patiently with counterspells and go find another one. They cost 0 to play.

The standard build runs three Living Ends. Once you've countered these, their only way of winning is hardcasting overcosted dumb creatures, so you can be much more relaxed about ensuring you always have countermagic open and start playing threats against them to close out the game. If the worst happens and they do manage to go off, all hope is not lost. We have Ugin, Angel, OStone, Bridge and Cyclonic Rift that can save us, and Wurmcoil Engine can sometimes stall against their army long enough to let us find a more permanent answer. Angel here has the odd role of being useless as a stabiliser before they've combo'd off, but very useful for protecting yourself afterwards. Karn is also great if you have the time, as he can find an Ensnaring Bridge, Chalice and our graveyard hate.

Our graveyard hate options are less required here than they are for other graveyard decks, since we rely mostly on counterspells and Chalice, however Relic, Tormod's Crypt and even Leyline of the Void do good work against Living End. Grafidigger's Cage however, does not stop the combo.

Tips and tricks:

- Counter the Living End, not the cascade spell. Say 'cascade trigger resolves' in response to them playing one.
- If you Mindslaver them, remember cascade is a 'may' ability, so you can waste some of their combo pieces and fail to play the Living End. Another option if they have the mana is cascading twice, as this uses up two Living Ends and still leaves them in the same position.
- If you think they're going to be able to combo off, use Thirst to get some Wurmcoils or Platinum Angel into the graveyard. You might just be able to hold off their horde.

Good Cards:

- Counterspells
- Chalice of the Void
- Relic of Progenitus
- Tormod's Crypt
- Ensnaring Bridge

Bad Cards:

- Dismember
- Solemn Simulacrum
- Spatial Contortion

## APPENDIX 2: FURTHER READING

This section contains few links to some other sources of information about the deck, and also my decklist and a few write-ups I've done whilst playing at tournaments. Due to COVID-19, the tournament reports are relatively dated but still serve to demonstrate lines of play.

### OTHER MATERIAL

#### THE MONO U TRON DECK THREAD ON MTGSALVATION

<https://www.mtgsalvation.com/forums/the-game/modern/established-modern/control/220176-monou-tron-the-well-oiled-machine>

#### PIERAKOR'S FAQ

<http://magicgatheringstrat.com/2015/09/mono-u-tron-faq/>

#### MATCHUP WINRATE ANALYSIS BY PIERAKOR (WITH DATA FROM SHOKTROOPA)

[https://www.reddit.com/r/TronMTG/comments/66lt0c/shoktroopa\\_vs\\_pierakor\\_mono\\_u\\_tron\\_matchup\\_data/](https://www.reddit.com/r/TronMTG/comments/66lt0c/shoktroopa_vs_pierakor_mono_u_tron_matchup_data/)

### AUTHOR'S TOURNAMENT REPORTS

#### AUTHOR'S DECKLIST

<https://tappedout.net/mtg-decks/07-06-17-utron/>

#### PPTQ 1<sup>ST</sup> PLACE (32 PLAYERS, 09/09/18)

[https://www.reddit.com/r/ModernMagic/comments/9em2io/report\\_pptq\\_first\\_place\\_with\\_mono\\_blue\\_tron/](https://www.reddit.com/r/ModernMagic/comments/9em2io/report_pptq_first_place_with_mono_blue_tron/)

#### FNM REPORTS

[https://www.reddit.com/r/ModernMagic/comments/8lhz9k/40\\_last\\_night\\_with\\_mono\\_u\\_tron/](https://www.reddit.com/r/ModernMagic/comments/8lhz9k/40_last_night_with_mono_u_tron/)

[https://www.reddit.com/r/ModernMagic/comments/8axu88/went\\_40\\_the\\_other\\_night\\_at\\_fnm\\_20\\_people\\_with\\_t\\_he/](https://www.reddit.com/r/ModernMagic/comments/8axu88/went_40_the_other_night_at_fnm_20_people_with_t_he/)