# The Necrovalley Doctrine: A Comprehensive Analysis of the Gravekeeper's Archetype

### **Section 1: The Philosophy of the Pharaonic Guardians: Core Strategy and Win Conditions**

The "Gravekeeper's" archetype stands as a monumental pillar in the history of the Yu-Gi-Oh! Trading Card Game. As the game's first true archetype, introduced in the 2003 set *Pharaonic Guardian*, its strategic identity has been refined over two decades, yet its core philosophy remains remarkably consistent: absolute control over the game state through resource denial.1 Understanding this archetype requires looking beyond individual card effects and grasping the interlocking doctrines that define its unique and enduring playstyle.

#### The "Stun" Doctrine

At its heart, the Gravekeeper's strategy is a masterclass in the "stun" playstyle.3 This approach is not defined by explosive, game-ending combos but by a methodical strangulation of the opponent's resources. The deck operates on a simple but devastatingly effective three-point plan: first, establish a lockdown on the Graveyard (GY) with its signature Field Spell,

Necrovalley; second, disrupt and halt the opponent's plays with a formidable lineup of trap cards and monster effects; and third, methodically dismantle the opponent's weakened field with resilient, high-ATK monsters until victory is achieved.4

The objective of a stun deck is to slow the pace of the duel and simplify the game state.3 In a simplified game with fewer cards on the field and in the hand for both players, the Gravekeeper's deck thrives. It leverages superior internal consistency and resource recursion to win a war of attrition. The goal is not necessarily to build an unbreakable board of omni-negates, but rather to methodically strip the opponent of their options, leaving them unable to execute their own strategy while the Gravekeeper's player maintains a steady flow of resources.

#### The Necrovalley Imperative

No card is more integral to an archetype's identity than Necrovalley is to Gravekeeper's. It is the sun around which every other card in the deck orbits; it is the "key to the deck," its centerpiece, and the engine that drives the entire strategy.2 The primary win condition of the archetype is to deploy

Necrovalley and prevent the opponent from accessing their Graveyard, a resource that has become increasingly vital in the modern era of Yu-Gi-Oh!.2

Every card included in a Gravekeeper's deck is evaluated based on its relationship to this Field Spell. Monsters and spells are chosen for their ability to search for Necrovalley, protect it from removal, or exploit the unique game state it creates. The presence of Necrovalley transforms the archetype's otherwise modest monsters into formidable threats, boosting their ATK and DEF and unlocking their most powerful effects.5 Without it, the deck is a collection of undersized Spellcasters; with it, it is a cohesive and oppressive control engine.

#### Historical Context and Evolution

The journey of the Gravekeeper's archetype mirrors the evolution of Yu-Gi-Oh! itself. Debuting in 2004's *Pharaonic Guardian* set in the TCG, it was the first card series to receive support that specifically named the archetype, setting a design precedent for the entire game.1 Initially, the strategy was a straightforward beatdown/stun deck, relying on

Gravekeeper's Spy for defense and advantage.1

The archetype saw a major renaissance in 2010 with the release of powerful new tools in *Absolute Powerforce* and *Starstrike Blast*. Gravekeeper's Descendant provided crucial in-archetype removal, while Gravekeeper's Recruiter offered unparalleled search power, allowing the deck to play a low monster count and maintain incredible consistency.1 This era solidified the deck's competitive identity. A second significant evolution occurred in 2018 with

*Soul Fusion*, which introduced Necrovalley Throne and Gravekeeper's Supernaturalist, pushing the deck towards a more proactive, fusion-centric strategy focused on protecting its key lockdown pieces.1

This history reveals a fundamental shift in the archetype's strategic application. Early competitive builds, particularly around the 2010-2012 era, were often proactive stun decks. They aimed to use the powerful spell card Royal Tribute on the first turn to discard all monsters from both players' hands, preemptively crippling the opponent before they could establish a board.4 This was a swift, high-impact strategy designed to win the game on the spot. However, as the game's overall speed increased and decks became more resilient, capable of rebuilding their resources from a single card or even benefiting from having cards in the Graveyard, the effectiveness of this hand-rip strategy diminished. Modern iterations of the deck have adapted by becoming more reactive and resilient. The primary goal has shifted from the immediate blowout of

Royal Tribute to the establishment of a protected Necrovalley lock via Gravekeeper's Supernaturalist. This boss monster's ability to make Necrovalley indestructible and generate card advantage each turn represents a move towards a long-term control strategy, designed to outlast the opponent rather than knock them out with a single punch.2

#### Modern Variants

Today, a Gravekeeper's pilot can choose from several strategic paths, each with its own strengths and weaknesses:

* **Gravekeeper's Stun:** This is the traditional approach, focusing on a low monster count, a high trap count, and winning through the sheer oppressive power of Necrovalley backed by floodgates and negation.2
* **Royal Tribute Turbo:** A more aggressive, "all-in" variant that maximizes the chances of opening with Necrovalley and Royal Tribute to win on turn one.2
* **Supernaturalist Turbo:** The most common modern variant, which prioritizes summoning Gravekeeper's Supernaturalist as quickly as possible to establish a protected lock and grind out victory through its search effect.8
* **Gravekeepers + Engines:** Hybrid builds that incorporate small, synergistic engines like Dogmatika or the powerful Red-Eyes Dark Dragoon to supplement the core Gravekeeper's strategy with additional layers of control and power.2

The choice between these variants is often dictated by the state of the competitive meta, showcasing the archetype's adaptability and its enduring legacy as a powerful rogue strategy.

### **Section 2: The Gravekeeper's Roster: An In-Depth Analysis of Key Monsters**

The strength of the Gravekeeper's archetype lies in its synergistic and highly specialized monster lineup. Each member serves a distinct purpose, from searching key resources to controlling the board, and their collective power is magnified exponentially when their pharaoh's tomb, Necrovalley, is active.

#### The Architects (Starters & Enablers)

These monsters are the foundation of the deck's strategy, responsible for initiating combos and ensuring access to the most critical cards.

* **Gravekeeper's Commandant**
  + **Effect:** You can discard this card to the GY; add 1 "Necrovalley" from your Deck to your hand. 11
  + **Analysis:** As the deck's most direct and reliable searcher for Necrovalley, Commandant is arguably the most important consistency tool in the entire archetype. Its effect is not once-per-turn and can be activated from the hand at Spell Speed 1, allowing a player to secure their Field Spell immediately. Beyond its primary role, discarding Commandant thins the deck and places a "Gravekeeper's" name in the Graveyard, setting up plays with cards like Gravekeeper's Headman or Gravekeeper's Stele. While rarely Normal Summoned, with Necrovalley on the field, its ATK becomes a respectable 2100, turning it into a capable offensive threat.2
* **Gravekeeper's Spy**
  + **Effect:** FLIP: Special Summon 1 "Gravekeeper's" monster with 1500 or less ATK from your Deck. 13
  + **Analysis:** Spy is the quintessential classic starter for the archetype. For years, a simple "set Spy, pass" was one of the strongest opening plays in the game. As a Flip monster, it provides a defensive wall that, upon being flipped, replaces itself and generates immediate board presence.4 Its effect can summon key combo pieces like  
    Gravekeeper's Spiritualist to enable Fusion plays, or a removal tool like Gravekeeper's Descendant. With Necrovalley active, Spy's DEF is boosted to a formidable 2500, a statistic that can halt the aggression of many modern strategies and force the opponent to commit resources to remove it by non-battle means.5
* **Gravekeeper's Headman**
  + **Effect:** If this card is Summoned: You can target 1 Level 4 "Gravekeeper's" monster in your GY; Special Summon it in Attack Position or face-down Defense Position. You can only use this effect of "Gravekeeper's Headman" once per turn. This effect is unaffected by "Necrovalley". 14
  + **Analysis:** Headman is a modern powerhouse and a vital extender. Its most crucial feature is that its revival effect explicitly bypasses the restrictions of Necrovalley, making it one of the few ways the deck can Special Summon from the Graveyard while its own floodgate is active.15 This allows for explosive follow-up plays, such as reviving a  
    Gravekeeper's Spiritualist to perform a second Fusion Summon or reviving another Level 4 monster to make a Rank 4 Xyz or Link-2 monster.16 The ability to summon a monster in face-down Defense Position is also highly valuable, as it allows for the reuse of the powerful Flip effects of  
    Gravekeeper's Spy and Gravekeeper's Guard.12
* **Gravekeeper's Spiritualist**
  + **Effect:** During your Main Phase, if "Necrovalley" is on the field: You can Fusion Summon 1 Spellcaster Fusion Monster from your Extra Deck, using this card you control and other monsters from your hand or field as Fusion Material. 7
  + **Analysis:** Spiritualist is the heart of the modern, proactive Gravekeeper's strategy. She is the in-archetype Polymerization, providing a direct and efficient path to the deck's main boss monster, Gravekeeper's Supernaturalist.9 Her effect requires  
    Necrovalley to be on the field, reinforcing the deck's central dependency. As a Level 4 DARK Spellcaster, she possesses excellent generic synergy and is easily searchable and summonable by the deck's other core cards.

#### The Engine (Searchers & Floaters)

This monster is dedicated to maintaining card advantage and ensuring the deck's engine continues to run smoothly.

* **Gravekeeper's Recruiter**
  + **Effect:** If this card you control is sent to your GY: Add 1 "Gravekeeper's" monster with 1500 or less DEF from your Deck to your hand. 19
  + **Analysis:** Recruiter is the archetype's primary "floater," a term for a monster that replaces itself with another card when it leaves the field.3 Its effect triggers whenever it is sent from the field to the Graveyard, whether by battle, card effect, or being used as Tribute, Link, or Fusion material. This makes it an incredibly versatile tool for generating card advantage. A common and powerful play involves tributing  
    Recruiter for the effect of Gravekeeper's Descendant, which results in destroying an opponent's card *and* searching for a new Gravekeeper's monster from the deck.4 Its search condition (1500 or less DEF) allows it to search for most of the deck's key monsters, including  
    Headman, Spiritualist, and another copy of itself.

#### The Wardens (Removal & Control)

These monsters are tasked with controlling the opponent's board through targeted removal and disruption.

* **Gravekeeper's Descendant**
  + **Effect:** You can Tribute 1 other face-up "Gravekeeper's" monster, then target 1 card your opponent controls; destroy that target. 21
  + **Analysis:** Descendant serves as the archetype's dedicated spot removal. Its ability to destroy any card the opponent controls provides a crucial answer to problematic threats. Critically, its effect is not once-per-turn, meaning a player with sufficient tribute fodder can activate it multiple times in a single turn to dismantle an entire board.5 It forms a classic and potent combination with  
    Gravekeeper's Spy, using the Spy it summoned as the cost for its effect, effectively turning one monster into a 2000 ATK body (under Necrovalley) and a destruction effect.5
* **Gravekeeper's Guard**
  + **Effect:** FLIP: Target 1 monster your opponent controls; return that target to the hand. 11
  + **Analysis:** Guard provides a different, but equally valuable, form of removal. Its effect, which returns a monster to the hand, is an archetypal Compulsory Evacuation Device.16 This is particularly effective against Extra Deck monsters that are immune to destruction effects, providing an out that  
    Descendant cannot. While its Flip effect makes it inherently slower than other options, its utility in specific matchups makes it a valuable tool in the Gravekeeper's arsenal.1

#### The Pharaohs (Boss Monsters)

These are the ultimate expressions of the archetype's power, serving as the capstones to its combos and the primary win conditions.

* **Gravekeeper's Supernaturalist**
  + **Effect:** 2 "Gravekeeper's" monsters. Gains ATK/DEF equal to the combined original Levels of the materials used for its Fusion Summon x 100. While "Necrovalley" is on the field, this card, and any card in your Field Zone, cannot be destroyed by card effects. During your Main Phase: You can activate this effect; during the End Phase of this turn, add 1 "Gravekeeper's" monster or 1 "Necrovalley" card from your Deck to your hand. 22
  + **Analysis:** Supernaturalist is the centerpiece of the modern Gravekeeper's end board. Its power lies in its multifaceted utility. First, its protection effect is paramount: while Necrovalley is active, Supernaturalist itself, Necrovalley, and all other cards in the Field and Spell/Trap Zones cannot be destroyed by card effects.2 This shields the entire lockdown strategy from common board-wipes like  
    Harpie's Feather Duster or Lightning Storm. Second, its end-phase search effect provides a slow but inexorable source of card advantage, ensuring the player has resources for subsequent turns and can win a prolonged grind game.7 Finally, its ATK/DEF boost typically makes it a 2800/2800 monster (when using two Level 4 monsters), a formidable body that can control the board through battle.2
* **Gravekeeper's Heretic**
  + **Effect:** This card on the field is unaffected by all other card effects, as long as "Necrovalley" is also on the field. 11
  + **Analysis:** Heretic is a unique and powerful control tool. Under the influence of Necrovalley, it becomes completely immune to all other card effects, transforming into a "Towers"-like monster that many decks are simply incapable of removing from the field.2 This makes it an incredibly potent threat against strategies that rely on monster effects for removal. However, this immunity is a double-edged sword;  
    Heretic is also unaffected by the 500 ATK/DEF boost from Necrovalley, meaning its ATK remains at a relatively modest 1800.2 This makes it a powerful but situational choice, best deployed in matchups where its immunity is more valuable than raw stats.

The design of the Gravekeeper's monster lineup reveals a core principle of "conditional power." Cards like Commandant, Spy, Descendant, and Spiritualist are intentionally designed to be average or below-average in a vacuum. However, once Necrovalley is on the field, their power level increases exponentially. Commandant becomes a 2100 ATK beater, Spy becomes a 2500 DEF wall, Descendant becomes a 2000 ATK threat with an active removal effect, and Spiritualist's fusion ability comes online. This synergistic dependency is the archetype's greatest strength, but it also creates its most significant vulnerability. An opponent who understands this does not need to defeat the Gravekeeper's monsters one by one; they only need to remove Necrovalley. This dynamic establishes a clear "choke point" for the duel, where the entire game revolves around the Gravekeeper's player's ability to protect their Field Spell and the opponent's attempts to destroy it.

### **Section 3: The Tools of the Tomb: Spells, Traps, and the Necrovalley Lock**

Beyond their legion of monsters, the Gravekeepers command a powerful arsenal of Spell and Trap cards designed to find, protect, and exploit their sacred ground, Necrovalley. These cards are the mortar that binds the archetype's strategy together, transforming a collection of monsters into a cohesive and oppressive lockdown engine.

#### Necrovalley: The Crown Jewel

The Field Spell Necrovalley is the soul of the archetype, and its effects have been the bane of Graveyard-reliant strategies for two decades. Understanding its precise functions and rulings is critical to piloting the deck effectively.

* **Effect (Modern Text):** All "Gravekeeper's" monsters on the field gain 500 ATK/DEF. Cards in the GY cannot be banished. Negate any card effect that would move a card in the GY to a different place. Negate any card effect that changes Types or Attributes in the GY. 24
* **Rulings Deep Dive:** The effect of Necrovalley is notoriously complex and often misunderstood. Its power lies in its specific prohibitions:
  + **What it STOPS:** The primary lockdown effect of Necrovalley is that it negates any effect that attempts to move a card *from* the Graveyard *to* another location (hand, deck, field, or banished zone).26 This includes iconic revival cards like  
    Monster Reborn, resource-looping cards like Pot of Avarice, and the summoning conditions of monsters like Chaos Sorcerer that require banishing cards from the GY as a cost.5 The blanket statement "Cards in the GY cannot be banished" is absolute and prevents banishing for any reason, including costs.
  + **What it does NOT STOP:** This is the most crucial distinction. Necrovalley does *not* stop effects that activate *within* the Graveyard, so long as that effect does not attempt to move another card out of the GY. For example, the effect of Sangan to search a monster when sent to the GY will resolve successfully.26 Furthermore, and most importantly,  
    Necrovalley does not stop a card's effect that moves *itself* out of the Graveyard. This means monsters like Treeborn Frog or Stardust Dragon can still activate their effects in the GY to Special Summon themselves.5
  + **Chain Link Dynamics:** Necrovalley is a continuous effect, but it must be face-up and resolved on the field for its lockdown to apply. If an opponent activates a Graveyard-related effect as Chain Link 2 in response to the initial activation of Necrovalley at Chain Link 1, the opponent's effect will resolve first, before Necrovalley's effect becomes active on the field.27
  + **Interaction with Skills:** In the context of Speed Duels, Necrovalley has a unique interaction with Skill Cards. Its effect-negating properties do not apply to Skills, meaning a Skill can still move a card from the GY to the hand. However, its absolute prohibition on banishing cards from the GY *does* apply to Skills, preventing them from being used if they require banishing from the GY.28

#### The Scepter (Necrovalley Throne)

* **Effect:** Activate 1 of these effects. ● Add 1 "Gravekeeper's" monster from your Deck to your hand. ● Immediately after this effect resolves, Normal Summon 1 "Gravekeeper's" monster. You can only activate 1 "Necrovalley Throne" per turn. 29
* **Analysis:** Released in 2018, Necrovalley Throne is the modern consistency booster that the archetype desperately needed. It functions as a flexible Reinforcement of the Army, capable of either searching for any "Gravekeeper's" monster or granting an additional Normal Summon.1 This flexibility is its greatest strength. It can be used to search for a key combo piece like  
  Gravekeeper's Headman or Gravekeeper's Spiritualist, or it can be used to swarm the field with multiple monsters in a single turn. This second effect is invaluable for setting up Tribute Summons, providing fodder for Gravekeeper's Descendant, or simply establishing a wider board presence under pressure.2

#### The Edict (Royal Tribute)

* **Effect:** If you control "Necrovalley": Both players discard any monsters in their hands. 7
* **Analysis:** Royal Tribute is one of the most powerful and game-altering floodgate cards ever printed. It is a high-risk, high-reward card that can single-handedly win the game on the first turn.4 When activated while  
  Necrovalley is on the field, it forces both players to discard all monster cards from their hands. For the Gravekeeper's player, who often runs a low monster count and can set their entire hand of Spells and Traps, this effect is asymmetrical. For the opponent, especially modern combo decks that rely on a hand full of monster-based starters and extenders, this effect is utterly devastating.5 While its power has waned slightly in an era where some decks benefit from GY setup, a resolved  
  Royal Tribute on turn one remains one of the most potent opening plays in the deck's history.1

#### The Lockdown (Hidden Temples of Necrovalley)

* **Effect:** Activate only if both a "Gravekeeper's" monster and "Necrovalley" are on the field. Neither player can Special Summon monsters, except "Gravekeeper's" monsters. If either a "Gravekeeper's" monster or "Necrovalley" is not on the field, destroy this card. 15
* **Analysis:** This Continuous Spell is the archetype's version of Vanity's Emptiness, a floodgate that completely shuts down Special Summoning for any non-Gravekeeper's monster. When combined with Necrovalley, it creates a nearly unbreakable lock for many decks. However, its power is balanced by its extreme fragility. The card requires both a "Gravekeeper's" monster and Necrovalley to remain on the field; if either is removed, Hidden Temples of Necrovalley immediately destroys itself.12 This makes it a powerful tool for solidifying a winning position but a risky card to rely on exclusively.

#### The Negation (Imperial Tombs of Necrovalley)

* **Effect:** When a Spell/Trap Card, or monster effect, is activated, while both a "Gravekeeper's" monster and "Necrovalley" are on the field: Negate the activation, and if you do, destroy it. 31
* **Analysis:** This Counter Trap is the archetype's personal Solemn Judgment. It is an omni-negate that can stop any Spell, Trap, or monster effect, providing crucial protection for the established board.3 It is the final layer of defense for the  
  Necrovalley lock, capable of negating the very threats that would otherwise dismantle it, such as Cosmic Cyclone or the effect of a monster that could remove Supernaturalist. Its only drawback is its strict activation requirement of controlling both a "Gravekeeper's" monster and Necrovalley, but in a deck dedicated to establishing that exact board state, it is an indispensable piece of the control strategy.33

### **Section 4: The Search and Synergy Network**

The longevity of the Gravekeeper's archetype is a direct result of its remarkably robust and interconnected network of internal searching and recursion. The deck is designed to flow seamlessly from one resource to another, ensuring that the player can consistently access key pieces and recover from disruptions. This intricate web of synergy allows the deck to thin itself quickly and maintain card advantage throughout the duel.

#### Mapping the Flow

The movement of resources within the archetype can be broken down into four primary pathways:

* **From Deck to Hand (Searching):** This is the most critical pathway for establishing the initial strategy. Necrovalley Throne is the premier searcher, capable of adding any "Gravekeeper's" monster from the Deck to the hand.29  
  Gravekeeper's Commandant serves the singular but vital purpose of searching Necrovalley itself by being discarded from the hand.24  
  Gravekeeper's Recruiter provides a continuous stream of resources, searching for any "Gravekeeper's" monster with 1500 or less DEF whenever it is sent from the field to the Graveyard.19 Finally, the boss monster  
  Gravekeeper's Supernaturalist acts as a long-term engine, allowing the player to search for any "Gravekeeper's" monster or "Necrovalley" card during each of their End Phases.22
* **From Deck to Field (Summoning):** The primary method of summoning directly from the Deck is the Flip effect of Gravekeeper's Spy. This allows the player to immediately field another "Gravekeeper's" monster with 1500 or less ATK, setting up combos with Descendant or Spiritualist.13 A slower, secondary option is  
  Gravekeeper's Nobleman, which can Special Summon a "Gravekeeper's" monster from the Deck in face-down Defense Position when destroyed by battle.11
* **From Graveyard to Hand (Recovery):** The main tool for resource recovery is the Spell Card Gravekeeper's Stele. It allows the player to target two "Gravekeeper's" monsters in their Graveyard and add them back to the hand. Crucially, its card text specifies that this effect cannot be negated by Necrovalley, ensuring its functionality even while the lockdown is active.1
* **From Graveyard to Field (Revival):** The archetype possesses two powerful revival tools that are specifically designed to function under Necrovalley. Gravekeeper's Headman, upon being Summoned, can Special Summon a Level 4 "Gravekeeper's" monster from the Graveyard, with its text explicitly stating the effect is unaffected by Necrovalley.14 Similarly, the Trap Card  
  Rite of Spirit targets and Special Summons one "Gravekeeper's" monster from the Graveyard, and its activation and effect are also unaffected by Necrovalley.7 These cards are essential for extending plays and recovering board presence.

#### The Gravekeeper's Resource Matrix

To visualize these interconnected pathways, the following matrix serves as a quick-reference guide to the archetype's flow of resources. This table clarifies which cards enable the movement of resources, from where they are sourced, what they can target, and where those resources end up.

| **Enabler Card** | **Activation Condition** | **Location Pulled From** | **Targets (Examples)** | **Destination** | **Notes** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Necrovalley Throne** | Spell Activation | Deck | All "Gravekeeper's" monsters | Hand | Can alternatively grant an additional Normal Summon 29 |
| **Gravekeeper's Commandant** | Discard from Hand | Deck | Necrovalley | Hand | Key consistency tool 11 |
| **Gravekeeper's Recruiter** | Sent from Field to GY | Deck | Headman, Spiritualist, Descendant, Spy (any GK with ≤1500 DEF) | Hand | The primary "floater" 19 |
| **Gravekeeper's Spy** | FLIP | Deck | Spiritualist, Descendant, Recruiter, Headman (any GK with ≤1500 ATK) | Field (Special Summon) | Sets up combos and board presence 13 |
| **Gravekeeper's Headman** | On Summon | Graveyard | Spiritualist, Spy, Descendant, Guard (any Level 4 GK) | Field (Special Summon) | Unaffected by Necrovalley 14 |
| **Gravekeeper's Stele** | Spell Activation | Graveyard | Any 2 "Gravekeeper's" monsters | Hand | Unaffected by Necrovalley 7 |
| **Rite of Spirit** | Trap Activation | Graveyard | Any 1 "Gravekeeper's" monster | Field (Special Summon) | Unaffected by Necrovalley 32 |
| **Gravekeeper's Supernaturalist** | Main Phase Effect | Deck | All "Gravekeeper's" monsters & "Necrovalley" cards | Hand (in End Phase) | The deck's main grind-game engine 22 |

### **Section 5: Executing the Strategy: Core Combo Lines and End Boards**

While Gravekeeper's is fundamentally a control deck, it possesses several efficient and powerful combo lines that allow it to establish its desired board state. These sequences are not long, convoluted chains, but rather short, synergistic plays that convert one or two cards into a formidable field presence. The "ideal end board" for Gravekeeper's is not static; it is a context-dependent state of control tailored to the opponent's strategy.

#### One-Card Combo: Gravekeeper's Recruiter -> Necrovalley

This simple yet effective combo demonstrates the deck's ability to access its most important card from a single monster.

1. **Starting Hand:** Gravekeeper's Recruiter.
2. Normal Summon Gravekeeper's Recruiter.
3. Immediately use Recruiter as material to Link Summon Artemis, the Magistus Moon Maiden.
4. Upon Recruiter being sent from the field to the Graveyard, its effect activates as Chain Link 1.
5. Resolve the effect of Recruiter to search for Gravekeeper's Commandant from the Deck and add it to the hand.
6. Activate the effect of Gravekeeper's Commandant in the hand, discarding it to search for Necrovalley from the Deck.

* **End Board Analysis:** This sequence concludes with Artemis, the Magistus Moon Maiden on the field, Necrovalley in hand, and two "Gravekeeper's" monsters (Recruiter and Commandant) in the Graveyard. This efficiently converts a single monster into guaranteed access to the deck's core Field Spell, all while setting up the Graveyard for future revival plays with Gravekeeper's Headman.20

#### Two-Card Combo: Necrovalley Throne / Spiritualist -> Supernaturalist

This is the quintessential opening play for the modern, fusion-centric build of the deck, aiming to establish the protected Necrovalley lock on turn one.

1. **Starting Hand:** Necrovalley Throne and any other "Gravekeeper's" monster (or a way to access Necrovalley).
2. Activate Necrovalley from your hand or search for it using Gravekeeper's Commandant.
3. Activate Necrovalley Throne, choosing its first effect to search for Gravekeeper's Spiritualist from the Deck.
4. Normal Summon Gravekeeper's Spiritualist.
5. With Necrovalley on the field, activate the effect of Spiritualist, using herself and the other "Gravekeeper's" monster in your hand or on your field as Fusion Material.
6. Fusion Summon Gravekeeper's Supernaturalist from the Extra Deck.

* **End Board Analysis:** The ideal turn one board for the modern deck. It consists of Gravekeeper's Supernaturalist and Necrovalley. With both on the field, Supernaturalist's protection effect becomes active, making Necrovalley and any set backrow immune to destruction by card effects. The player can then activate Supernaturalist's second effect, guaranteeing a search for another "Gravekeeper's" monster or "Necrovalley" card during the End Phase, thus setting up the long-term grind game.9

#### Classic Combo: Gravekeeper's Spy -> Descendant Removal

This is the archetype's classic offensive sequence, converting a defensive monster into board presence and removal.

1. **Setup:** Set Gravekeeper's Spy face-down.
2. During the opponent's Battle Phase or on your subsequent turn, flip Gravekeeper's Spy face-up.
3. The Flip effect of Spy activates, allowing you to Special Summon Gravekeeper's Descendant from your Deck.
4. Activate the effect of Gravekeeper's Descendant, tributing the now face-up Gravekeeper's Spy as cost.
5. Target and destroy one card your opponent controls.

* **Follow-up/Variation:** This combo is even more potent if Gravekeeper's Recruiter is used as the tribute fodder instead of Spy. In that scenario, tributing Recruiter for Descendant's effect not only destroys an opponent's card but also triggers Recruiter's effect, allowing you to search for another "Gravekeeper's" monster, resulting in a significant gain in card advantage.4

#### Extender Combo: Gravekeeper's Headman Lines

Gravekeeper's Headman is the key to the deck's follow-up plays and its access to the generic Extra Deck toolbox.

1. **Setup:** Gravekeeper's Headman in hand, Gravekeeper's Spiritualist in the Graveyard, and Necrovalley on the field.
2. Normal Summon Gravekeeper's Headman.
3. The effect of Headman activates, targeting and Special Summoning Gravekeeper's Spiritualist from the Graveyard.
4. With two "Gravekeeper's" monsters on the field, you can now activate Spiritualist's effect to Fusion Summon a second Gravekeeper's Supernaturalist.

* **Alternative Line:** Instead of going for another Fusion Summon, the two monsters on the field (Headman and the revived Level 4) can be used for other purposes. They can be overlaid to Xyz Summon a powerful Rank 4 monster like Number 41: Bagooska the Terribly Tired Tapir for an additional layer of stun.34 Alternatively, they can be used as material to Link Summon a powerful generic monster like  
  S:P Little Knight for targeted, non-destruction removal and interruption.17

The combo structures within the Gravekeeper's archetype reveal a strategic depth that goes beyond a simple linear path. Unlike many modern combo decks that aim to construct a singular, monolithic end board of negations, Gravekeeper's plays are more akin to opening a flexible toolbox. The Spy line provides removal. The Spiritualist line provides protection and resource generation. The Headman line provides extension and access to a variety of control options from the generic Extra Deck. The skill in piloting this deck lies not in memorizing one long sequence, but in correctly assessing the game state and choosing the right tool for the job. The "ideal end board" is therefore fluid: against a combo deck, it is the protected Supernaturalist lock; against an established board, it might be a Descendant to clear threats; against a monster-heavy strategy, it could be a Bagooska. This adaptability is the hallmark of a true control strategy.

### **Section 6: Modernization and Adaptation: Tech Choices, Engines, and the Extra Deck**

To remain relevant in the fast-paced environment of modern Yu-Gi-Oh!, the classic Gravekeeper's core must be augmented with powerful non-archetypal cards and engines. These additions help to shore up the deck's inherent weaknesses, such as its slow speed and vulnerability when going second, while enhancing its core control strategy.

#### Non-Archetypal Staples & Floodgates

* **Draw Power:** Consistency is a major challenge for Gravekeeper's. To mitigate this, players often employ powerful generic draw spells. Pot of Duality allows a player to excavate the top three cards of their deck and add one to their hand, at the cost of being unable to Special Summon for the turn. This restriction is often manageable for the slow-paced stun variant.4 For more explosive draws,  
  Pot of Extravagance and Pot of Prosperity offer the ability to draw cards or excavate for key pieces by banishing cards from the Extra Deck. Since the deck often only needs a few specific Extra Deck monsters, this is a viable trade-off.20
* **Floodgates:** To complement the Necrovalley lock, players can include other powerful continuous floodgate cards. Traps like Rivalry of Warlords (restricting each player to one monster Type), Gozen Match (restricting to one Attribute), and There Can Be Only One (restricting to one monster of each Type) can be devastating when combined with the deck's primary strategy. However, care must be taken as these can sometimes conflict with the Gravekeeper's own monsters, which include both DARK and EARTH attributes.20
* **Hand Traps & Interaction:** To survive when forced to go second, a suite of staple "hand traps" is essential. Cards like Ash Blossom & Joyous Spring, which can negate an effect that moves a card from the Deck, and Infinite Impermanence, which can negate a monster's effect, provide crucial interaction during the opponent's turn, preventing them from building an unbreakable board before the Gravekeeper's player has a chance to set up.20

#### External Engines

* **Dogmatika:** A compact engine consisting of Dogmatika Ecclesia, the Virtuous and Dogmatika Punishment can be seamlessly integrated. Ecclesia provides an additional body and a search for Punishment, a powerful trap that can destroy an opponent's monster and send a monster from the Extra Deck to the GY, providing further disruption.9
* **Red-Eyes Dark Dragoon:** Some of the most successful rogue builds of Gravekeeper's have incorporated the Red-Eyes Fusion engine. By including Red-Eyes Fusion, Dark Magician, and Red-Eyes Black Dragon in the Main Deck, the player gains access to Red-Eyes Dark Dragoon, an incredibly powerful boss monster with effect negation, destruction immunity, and a high ATK value. Dragoon provides a win condition that is independent of the Necrovalley lock, giving the deck an alternate path to victory.1
* **Malefic:** The Malefic engine offers a simple way to summon high-ATK monsters. Since the deck's strategy revolves around maintaining a Field Spell, cards like Malefic Cyber End Dragon (a 4000 ATK beater) and Malefic Stardust Dragon (which protects Field Spells from destruction) can be Special Summoned for free. This provides both offensive pressure and an additional layer of protection for Necrovalley.4

#### The Extra Deck Toolbox

While the Main Deck is the heart of the strategy, a well-constructed Extra Deck provides the versatility needed to handle a wide range of situations.

* **Fusion Monsters:** Three copies of Gravekeeper's Supernaturalist are mandatory as the deck's primary boss monster. Some builds also include Quintet Magician as a potential game-ending threat, summonable via Magicalized Fusion by banishing five Spellcaster monsters from the field or Graveyard (a play that must be made before Necrovalley is on the field).20
* **Xyz Monsters:** The Rank 4 Xyz toolbox is essential. Key options include Number 41: Bagooska the Terribly Tired Tapir for additional monster effect negation, Tornado Dragon for Spell/Trap removal, and Abyss Dweller for a redundant but powerful form of Graveyard hate.35 For offensive pushes, the "Utopia" package, culminating in  
  Number S39: Utopia the Lightning, provides a way to deal massive damage and overcome problematic monsters.3
* **Link Monsters:** Modern Link monsters provide crucial utility. Artemis, the Magistus Moon Maiden is key for the one-card Recruiter combo.20 Generic DARK support like  
  Wee Witch's Apprentice boosts the ATK of all DARK monsters.35 Most importantly, powerful generic Link-2 monsters like  
  I:P Masquerena and S:P Little Knight offer invaluable disruption and non-destruction removal, allowing the deck to interact with the opponent on their turn and out threats that are immune to destruction.17 Where it is legal,  
  Predaplant Verte Anaconda offers an alternative, easy route to Fusion Summoning Supernaturalist via Magicalized Fusion.20

### **Section 7: Navigating the Meta: Key Matchups and Strategic Considerations**

The competitive viability of the Gravekeeper's archetype is not a constant. It ebbs and flows with the tides of the broader metagame. As a dedicated anti-meta strategy, its strength is defined less by its own inherent power and more by the weaknesses of the most popular decks in a given format. Understanding its favorable and unfavorable matchups is key to knowing when to deploy this ancient strategy.

#### Favorable Matchups (Graveyard-Reliant Decks)

Gravekeeper's excels against any strategy that heavily relies on the Graveyard as a resource. This has been true throughout its history, with favorable matchups against older decks like Chaos Dragons, Agents, and HEROs, all of which required access to the Graveyard to function.4

This strength continues into the modern era. Top-tier strategies that are fundamentally dependent on Graveyard effects, recursion, or banishing from the GY are severely crippled by a resolved Necrovalley. Decks like Unchained, which activate effects when their cards are destroyed and sent to the GY; Dragon Link, which uses the GY to extend combos and summon Bystial monsters; and Labrynth, which recycles its powerful trap cards from the GY, all struggle to execute their primary game plan under the Necrovalley lock.10 Against these decks, the Gravekeeper's player's goal is simple and direct: establish and protect

Necrovalley at all costs. In many cases, the Field Spell itself is the win condition, as the opponent's engine is completely shut down.

#### Unfavorable Matchups (Decks that Bypass the Lock)

Conversely, the archetype struggles against decks that can operate without significant Graveyard interaction. Historically, this included decks like Dino Rabbit, which focused on Xyz Summoning from the hand and deck, or Six Samurai, which swarmed the field with monsters that did not rely on GY effects.4

Modern examples of unfavorable matchups follow the same principle. These include:

* **Decks with Overwhelming ATK:** Strategies that can consistently summon monsters with ATK values higher than Supernaturalist (typically 2800-3000) can simply win through battle, ignoring the Necrovalley lock entirely.
* **Decks with Non-Destruction Removal:** Since Supernaturalist only protects Necrovalley from destruction effects, cards and archetypes that can banish, spin, or return Necrovalley to the hand can easily dismantle the lock. Cosmic Cyclone is a particularly potent threat.
* **Decks that Don't Use the Graveyard:** Archetypes like Floowandereeze, which focuses on Normal Summoning and banishing its own cards, or Kashtira, which banishes cards from the opponent's deck face-down, are largely unconcerned with Necrovalley's restrictions. Against these decks, the Gravekeeper's primary floodgate becomes a minor inconvenience rather than a game-winning card.
* **Going Second Vulnerability:** The deck's most significant structural weakness is its poor performance when going second against an established board. It lacks inherent board-breaking potential and can be easily overwhelmed by multiple negations or interruptions before it has a chance to set up its own control scheme.9

#### Side Decking Strategy

A well-constructed Side Deck is crucial for mitigating these weaknesses and adapting the strategy between games.

* **Going First:** When the Gravekeeper's player knows they will have the first turn, they can side in even more powerful floodgates and protection. Cards like Anti-Spell Fragrance, which slows down Spell-based decks, or additional copies of Solemn Judgment can be used to solidify the opening lockdown and make it nearly impossible for the opponent to break through.37
* **Going Second:** When forced to go second, the Side Deck must be transformed to include powerful board-breaking cards. Spells like Dark Ruler No More, which negates all of the opponent's monster effects for a turn, Evenly Matched, which can banish most of the opponent's field face-down, and Lightning Storm, which can destroy all of their Attack Position monsters or all of their Spells and Traps, are essential for having a chance to play the game.9
* **Specific Techs:** The Side Deck can also house specific counter-cards for difficult matchups. For example, Gravekeeper's Shaman can be sided in against decks that have many effects that activate in the Graveyard (like Tearlaments or Burning Abyss), as she prevents those effects from activating altogether, providing an even harder GY lock than Necrovalley alone.3

The matchup spread of the Gravekeeper's archetype reveals its true nature in the modern game. It is not a deck that can be played in any format and expect consistent success. Instead, it functions as a "meta-call" deck. Its competitive viability is a direct reflection of the popularity of Graveyard-centric strategies in the tournament scene. When the top decks are heavily reliant on the Graveyard, Gravekeeper's emerges as a potent rogue contender, capable of defeating the best strategies with a single, well-timed Field Spell. When the meta shifts away from the Graveyard, the deck recedes into the background. This cyclical nature makes the decision to play Gravekeeper's a strategic one that begins before the first card is even drawn, solidifying its status as the quintessential anti-meta choice.

### **Conclusion**

The Gravekeeper's archetype is a living testament to the depth and evolution of the Yu-Gi-Oh! TCG. From its origins as the game's first cohesive strategy to its modern incarnation as a complex control deck, it has consistently rewarded players who master its intricate synergies and understand its core philosophy of resource denial. The deck's power is anchored to its legendary Field Spell, Necrovalley, a card so influential that it has shaped metagames for two decades. The entire archetype is a finely tuned machine built to find, protect, and exploit this single card, transforming a group of modest Spellcasters into an oppressive lockdown engine.

Modernization has been key to its continued relevance. The introduction of Gravekeeper's Supernaturalist shifted the deck's focus from a fragile, proactive stun strategy to a resilient, long-term control game. The ability to protect its entire board from destruction and generate consistent card advantage allows the modern deck to outlast opponents in a war of attrition. This core strategy is now supplemented by a flexible toolbox of non-archetypal staples, external engines, and a versatile Extra Deck, allowing skilled pilots to adapt their game plan to a wide variety of threats.

However, the archetype's strengths are balanced by clear and significant weaknesses. Its deep dependency on Necrovalley creates a central point of failure, and its inherently slow, control-oriented pace makes it vulnerable when forced to play second against the explosive combo decks of the modern era. This dichotomy defines its role in the competitive ecosystem: Gravekeeper's is the ultimate "meta-call." Its power is not absolute but relative, rising and falling in direct opposition to the prevalence of Graveyard-reliant strategies. In a format dominated by such decks, it stands as a formidable rogue contender, capable of dismantling the most powerful strategies with its ancient and unyielding control. For the dedicated duelist, mastering the Gravekeeper's archetype is not just about learning combos; it is about learning to read the pulse of the game itself and knowing precisely when the pharaoh's guardians are needed to restore order to the duel.

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