

UB Oculus Modern Beginner Guide

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Intro

My name is Maria, I'm a Magic the Gathering competitive player and streamer. My strongest suit is game strategy and resource optimization.

Even though UB Oculus has not performed well in the past Regional Championship in Prague, it remains a tier-1 deck. I decided to write this deck guide as a closing chapter in this Modern RC season based on my preparation and knowledge of the deck. It is mainly aimed

at those who want to start playing this deck, but it will also be useful for those players who would like to improve their game play.

I wish there was a detailed guide when I started playing the deck, but even in paid guides I couldn't find a deep analytical description of the deck and spell-sequencing. It would have saved me a lot of time in preparation. So, here you will find all the information I've gathered, from the very basics to specific insights I obtained during testing with Sanctum of All.

Deck overview

This is the list that I played at RC Prague:

<https://moxfield.com/decks/0ZR9NzQcnkWsA-nowkD4lw>

4 Abhorrent Oculus
1 Bloodstained Mire
1 Cling to Dust
3 Consider
3 Counterspell
4 Fatal Push
1 Flooded Strand
3 Force of Negation
1 Graveyard Trespasser
1 Harbinger of the Seas
2 Island
1 Misty Rainforest
2 Murktide Regent
2 Orcish Bowmasters
4 Polluted Delta
4 Psychic Frog
2 Scalding Tarn
1 Shoot the Sheriff
2 Sink into Stupor
3 Spell Snare
1 Stern Scolding
1 Swamp
4 Thought Scour
2 Undercity Sewers
4 Unearth
3 Watery Grave
SIDEBOARD:
2 Brazen Borrower
3 Consign to Memory
2 Engineered Explosives
2 Harbinger of the Seas
3 Nihil Spellbomb
1 Stern Scolding
1 Subtlety
1 Toxic Deluge

UB Oculus is essentially a tempo deck that often transitions into midrange strategy. The main threat of the deck is **Psychic Frog** combined with **Abhorrent Oculus**, which you can cheat early in the game by reanimating it with **Unearth**.



While having this board presence we may protect it as well as keep control of the game with counter spells:



What gives the deck flexibility is access to cheap and efficient removal, such as **Fatal Push**. Combined with counter and removal spells, the deck may play more aggressively or more on a control side depending on a match-up.



Cantrips play an essential role in the deck because it heavily relies on a graveyard interaction. They also allow us to play as little as 17 lands (here 19 total including MDFC). Self-mill and surveil effects allow us to fill the graveyard fast so we can put our threats efficiently. Apart from **Abhorrent Oculus**, there is also **Murktide Regent**: “2-mana” substantial threat in a classic tempo strategy.



Flexible slots

Other creatures



Orcish Bowmasters lost its popularity because there is essentially one tier-1 aggro-deck in the format – Boros Energy. Against the rest of the field this card is quite mediocre. However, Boros is extremely popular and the deck-to-beat. So **Orcish Bowmasters** main deck significantly improves this match-up. I played 4 times during the weekend in Prague against Boros and won every match. It is definitely a meta-game choice, which I was happy about.



Harbinger of the Seas main deck or not main deck was the biggest question for me before going into the tournament. With open decklists I decided to add 1 copy main deck and 2 into my sideboard just as a scary factor because against certain decks this effect is very punishing, which may lead to suboptimal decisions regarding fetching a basic land in early game. Otherwise I don't like this card main deck because it may be disruptive for our own game-plan as well: we have to keep in mind to save a black-source fetch-land to find a Swamp, and having this Swamp on board severs plays like Murktide + Counterspell.



Graveyard Trespasser is an interesting singleton. This is a real threat that does not rely on a graveyard interaction. At the same time, it is synergetic with **Unearth**. In my experience it proved to be very useful against multiple match-ups, particularly against Boros because of life gain (plus exiling **Phlage**, **Titan of Fire's Fury** or **Seasoned Pyromancer** is very critical); against the mirror and Breach Station because both of these decks heavily rely on graveyard; even against Eldrazi to delay **Emrakul, the Promised End**.

Other spells



One way or another pretty much every tier deck in Modern interacts with graveyard. **Cling to Dust** is an unconventional choice for a graveyard-hate in the main deck. The downside is that you exile only one card and you rarely want to cast it for the escape cost. However, the upside is that it is a closed information in your hand in comparison to **Nihil Bomb**, and you don't have to invest mana, which is very critical early game. Another benefit is that you can exile a creature – ideally Phlage - and gain life, which proved to be critical against Boros.

Escape sometimes is not as bad as it seems if we have Murktide on board: by escaping Cling to Dust we put additional counters on it. I like this card for its versatility but essentially it is my 4th Consider.

I would advise against **Surgical Extraction** and **Leyline of the Void** because despite their efficiency, it is essentially a card-disadvantage.



Shoot the Sheriff is unconditional removal, specifically against opponent's **Murktide Regent**, which is a card that wins the mirror match. **Bitter Triumph** is another option as it allows to discard Oculus when needed and targets planeswalkers as well.



Stern Scolding is another meta-game choice. It is particularly aimed at Boros Energy, although it is actually universally good: it counters **Psychic Frog** in the mirror; **Tamiyo**, **Inquisitive Student** and **Emry, Lurker of the Loch** in Breach Station; **Tameshi, Reality Architect** (and any other creature) in Belcher; **Ral, Monsoon Mage** in Ruby Storm; any creature in Golgari Yawgmoth; **Basking Broodscale** and **Glaring Fleshrazer**. I would say that among tier decks it is a dead card only against Eldrazi Ramp.

In conclusion regarding flexible slots, there are many ways to alter the deck to the meta. Some prefer more removal to counter spells, some decide not to play **Counterspell** at all and add disruption - **Thoughtseize** and/or **Dreams of Steel and Oil** - instead.

In my opinion disruption spells does not fit the deck structurally: first two-three turns are usually dedicated to filling the graveyard and preparing for putting a threat on board, something like turn1 fetch-land into surveil land, turn2 either **Psychic Frog** or another land drop and pass the turn, sitting on a counter spell/removal/cantrip. So, tapping out for a sorcery spell in early game creates an awkward spell-sequencing and does not fit the plan. That being said, I would consider playing **Thoughtseize** in sideboard. It is good in the mirror, against Eldrazi and certain combo decks. There is also an option to Thoughtseize yourself to discard Oculus and reanimate it with Unearth, but it is card disadvantage.

Lands

I think 17 lands + 2 MDFC **Sink Into Stupor/Soporific Springs** is the perfect amount. 9 fetch-lands: 4 **Polluted Delta**, another 4 blue sources and 1 black one; 2 surveil lands – **Undercity Sewers**; 3 **Watery Grave**; 3 basic lands – 2 **Island** and 1 **Swamp**.

The deck functions perfectly on 4 mana (5 max), and you really need an untapped land in mid-late game, which makes **Darkslick Shores** sub-optimal.

Tip: If you already have 4 lands in play, I suggest not making a land drop, unless much needed. You can always discard it for Frog to make it a bigger threat, and it also creates an illusion of your card-advantage for an opponent.

Counter spell choice

3 **Counterspell**: we don't want to have it in multiples in our hand, and not always in our starting hand, but going into a big tournament or an unknown meta I still want to have them in my deck. Current Modern meta is very low-curve (apart from Eldrazi) and fast, so Counterspell feels sub-optimal and even awkward at times, but it shines in the mid-late game.

3 **Force of Negation**: this is a necessary evil, it is card disadvantage, but tempo advantage because we can tap out for a threat and then protect it on an opponent's turn or react to their combo piece.

3 **Spell Snare**: efficient and cheap counter spell that has you covered in the mirror against **Psychic Frog** and **Counterspell**, in Boros against **Ajani**, **Nacatl Pariah** and **Goblin Bombardment**, in Breach Station against **Breach the Underworld**, **Grinding Station** and **Malevolent Rumble**, in Eldrazi against **Malevolent Rumble** and **Talisman**.

1 **Stern Scolding**: I've already talked about it, but another option can be **Spell Pierce**.

Sideboard



Brazen Borrower and **Subtlety** are my mirror-game plan. Bounce effects on **Oculus** and **Murktide** are very punishing. **Mystical Dispute** is another great card against the mirror, but in my list, I have enough counter spells as is, and I found that bounce-effects are more impactful anyway. Another thought behind these options is that they do not interact with your graveyard, which makes the deck more resilient if you face too much graveyard exiling effects.



Nihil Spellbomb is so far the best card to deal with opponent's graveyard. Even though it is not an ultimate answer to graveyard interaction, it certainly fits our game plan being a tempo card. Specifically, against the mirror and Breach station.



Engineered Explosives and **Toxic Deluge** are our so-called sweepers against Boros, but while the later goes specifically against creature-based decks, Explosives is also our answer to Mox Opal decks, and Breach Station in particular. In the Boros match-up Explosives can deal with **Static Prison** and **Goblin Bombardment**.



Consign to Memory is a staple sideboard card in any blue deck. We board it against Eldrazi, Belcher and Amulet Titan.

The rest of my sideboard are 2 **Harbinger of the Seas** and 1 **Stern Scolding**.

Match-ups and sideboard plan

Boros Energy

This list is tailored against this deck: we have **Graveyard Trespasser**, **Orcish Bowmasters**, **Cling to Dust**, **Stern Scolding** main deck. From my experience with this list, you are favored. You play as a control against them: first turns you are going to answer to their threats. At the same time, it is important to establish board presence as early as possible. Ideally something like t1 Fatal Push, t2 Spell Snare and a cantrip or Orcish Bowmasters, t3 Frog/Oculus and a piece of interaction.

They would want to board in value-generating options such as **Showdown of the Scalds**.

*If you see 4 **Fable the Mirror-breaker** and the saga, I wouldn't board out all copies of Force of Negation, but rather trim it alongside with Counterspell.

IN:

2 Engineered Explosives
1 Toxic Deluge
1 Stern Scolding

OUT:

1 Harbinger of the Seas
3 Force of Negation*

UB Oculus

Here we can keep slower hands because the games are usually slow and grindy, and we don't want to cast our Frog on t2. Frog is extremely valuable in this matchup as it generates card-advantage, so when we are ready to cast it, we must have a counter to protect it or a piece of interaction to respond to a threat.

Post-board I like to trim my graveyard interaction because graveyard-exiling effects are expected, and we don't want to depend on it too much.

*If your opponent doesn't play Orcish Bowmasters, I would cut Stern scolding instead of Force of Negation.

Tip: Keep a fetch land intact so you can kill Oculus with Fatal Push.

IN:

3 Nihil Spellbomb
2 Brazen Borrower
1 Subtlety

OUT:

1 Abhorrent Oculus
1 Unearth

- 1 Harbinger of the Seas
- 3 Force of Negation

Temur Breach Station

This is one of the most difficult match-ups because not only do we have to prevent the combo, we also have to control Construct tokens from **Urza's Saga** and value-generation from Emry and Tamiyo.

It is a very resilient and multi-layered deck, so you may face situations (especially post-board) where you have answers to the combo, but they choose an aggro-line with Constructs, or outr grind you with Tamiyo and Emry; and vice-versa. It is difficult to control the situation simply because you may not have a relevant answer, at the same time it is critical to put an early pressure: t2 Frog is a big problem for them as well as Trespasser. So, we have to keep their graveyard clean, kill Tamiyo and Emry on the spot, have Harbinger on board and a threat (Frog or Oculus), then we should be good *ha-ha*! But on a serious note, probably the most important is to exile their graveyard, don't allow them to have Delirium. This way you'll have more time.

Tip: you have to respond to the third Urza's saga chapter trigger, either by discarding a card if needed for a Frog to put a counter on it or fetching a land because they may want to find **Pithing Needle** instead of **Soul-Guide Lantern**.

IN:

- 3 Nihil Spellbomb
- 2 Engineered Explosives
- 2 Harbinger of the Seas

OUT:

- 2 Oculus
- 2 Orcish Bowmasters
- 2 Unearth
- 1 Thought Scour

Eldrazi Ramp

I would say it is a 50-50 match-up, very dependent on how fast they can ramp. Turn 2 Frog is where we want to be in this game, meaning establishing early threats is crucial. If we can counter **Kozilek's Command** and Talismans, we should be good. Harbinger of the Seas main deck helps too.

From my experience, you must cast Force of Negation to counter Talisman: we can't win the late game, also there are not a lot of targets for this counter spell. They would want to cast the Command on our turn, but it should be easily anticipated because they wouldn't tap out on their turn. **Karn, the Great Creator** is not a big problem for us, but it gives them advantage.

IN:

- 3 Consign to Memory

2 Nihil Spellbomb
2 Harbinger of the Seas
1 Subtlety

OUT:

2 Orcish Bowmasters
4 Fatal Push
1 Stern Scolding
1 Graveyard Trespasser

Orzhov Blink

This may be the worst match-up for us: **Aether Vial** makes our counterspells close to useless, and pretty much all of their ETB effects disrupt our plan.

We can't take a position of control because eventually they would outgrind us, so we have to be the beatdown in this match-up. Ideally, we would want to have a couple of threats on board, because one threat is too easy for them to deal with (**Phelia**, **Exuberant Shepherd** exiles in combat, **Solitude**, **Scyclave Apparition**).

Graveyard Trespasser is an excellent threat against them because of the ward and because it exiles creatures from their graveyard. Force of Negation to counter Vial is crucial.

IN:

2 Engineered Explosives
1 Stern Scolding
1 Toxic Deluge

OUT:

2 Murktide Regent
1 Harbinger of the Seas
1 Counterspell

Golgari Yawgmooth

This match-up is very draw-dependent: if they go first and cast **Grist, the Hunger Tide** on turn 2, it's almost impossible to win for us. The most annoying thing is that we can't counter Grist with Force of Negation because of its static ability, but keep in mind that we can counter it with Stern Scolding. Another big threat for us is **Agatha's Soul Cauldron**, which should be countered.

I would say that their combo plan with **Yawgmooth**, **Thran Physician** is rather easy for us to deal with.

IN:

3 Nihil Spellbomb
1 Stern Scolding
1 Toxic Deluge

OUT:

- 1 Harbinger of the Seas
- 3 Force of Negation
- 1 Spell Snare

Tameshi Belcher

This is a slightly favored match-up for us. Early threat – t2 Frog – is where we want to be here. However, resolved **Whir of Invention** at the end of our turn is very problematic for us. It's important to counter creatures (which shouldn't be a problem with 3 copies of Spell Snare) that give them value with ETB abilities and then serve as a fodder for **Flare of Denial**. It's ok to Fatal Push them as well for that reason, although the real problem for us is **Tameshi, Reality Architect**, and it should be killed on the spot. It allows them to secure their combo but also gives a significant card-advantage.

Tip: You want to counter the second trigger of suspended **Lotus Bloom**, after the last counter is removed, with Consign to Memory, this way it stays in exile.

IN:

- 3 Consign to Memory
- 1 Nihil Spellbomb
- 2 Brazen Borrower

OUT:

- 2 Orcish Bowmasters
- 1 Graveyard Trespasser
- 1 Harbinger of the Seas
- 2 Fatal Push

Ruby Storm

This is a favored matchup for us. Early turns we must play as control. Countering **Ruby Medallion** an/or **Ral, Monsoon Mage** is essential. In situations when Medallion is already on board and they go for a blind combo, I wouldn't counter Desperate/Pyretic Ritual, but rather a spell after it. **Past in Flames** is critical to counter.

IN:

- 3 Consign to Memory
- 3 Nihil Spellbomb

OUT:

- 2 Orcish Bowmasters
- 1 Harbinger of the Seas
- 1 Fatal Push
- 1 Shoot the Sheriff

Amulet Titan

Pre-board it is a difficult match-up, but at least we have **Harbinger of the Seas** main deck. Post-board it should be significantly better. Blood moon - in our case "Flood moon" – effect is the win con for us. However, **Green Sun's Zenith** (GSZ) gave the deck flexibility: post-board they find **Hexdrinker** with it, which may be hard to race for us. Force of Negation to counter **Amulet of Vigor** and GSZ is a must.

IN:

3 Consign to Memory
1 Engineered Explosives
2 Harbinger of the Seas
1 Subtlety

OUT:

2 Orcish Bowmasters
4 Fatal Push
1 Stern Scolding

Starting hands and sequencing

I cannot emphasize enough how important the first three turns are and the decisions you make during those turns, starting with land drops.

Ideal sequence looks like that:

- t1 fetch-land drop into surveil land;
- t2 Psychic Frog OR another fetch-land drop and pass the turn into finding another surveil land and casting Thought Scour/Consider AND/OR responding to an opponent's action;
- t3 discard Oculus for the Frog's ability, reanimate it with Unearth and have 2 open mana for further interaction.

It's not always going to look like that, but the most important thing here is to make a correct land drop to optimize your resources. Fetch-land into surveil land is our perfect start because not only do we take the tapped lands out of the deck, but also fill the graveyard. If you have Consider/Thought Scour in hand and think that this is your t1 action, most of the time it's incorrect. Think of Undercity Sewers as your free Consider. Your t2 and t3 you may spend to further dig for threats by casting these cantrips. They are also useful for pitching for Force of Negation.

The earlier you take tapped lands out of the deck the better because having untapped lands in mid-late game is very important.

Let's review some of the starting hands.



This is a very mediocre hand because we have no threats and too many lands, but it's a potential keep because we have fetch-lands => surveil lands, cantrips and a counterspell. We start with fetch into surveil, then t2 we can react with Counterspell or continue digging for threats.

However, don't keep hands like this against combo-decks. OTD against Boros this is also a mulligan.



This is the best hand for our aggro plan. The sequencing will depend on a match-up and OTD/OTP, but if we can cast t2 Frog, then t3 Unearth to Oculus and sit on interaction, it's the best possible scenario for us.

OTD I would drop basic Island first.



This hand is similar to the previous one, but it's worse: if we don't draw another blue spell, Force of Negation is a dead card in hand because this hand is very proactive.



This is a great hand, but keep in mind what I've been talking about before: even with two cantrips in hand, we want to start with surveil land on t1.



This is a very awkward hand, not just because we don't have fetch-lands, but mostly because of the basic Swamp. In most of the cases I don't want to fetch for it, so having it in a starting hand could seriously damage your spell-sequencing and overall gameplay. Even though there are no threats, depending on a match-up, it may be a keep with correct lands, but it is a mulligan.

Epilogue

This is certainly a difficult deck to pilot and requires a lot of practice and overall gaming experience. For the current RC circuit, it is not the best choice, but it will be strong in the long run. I personally really enjoy playing this deck because it is very interactive and powerful.

Hope this was useful for you and thanks for reading!

This guide is free, but donations are highly appreciated: <https://ko-fi.com/mythicmaria>

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