Modern day theory, how to build and pilot UW control in FIRE standard

“If you give a man a fish he will eat for the day, If you teach a man to fish he will eat for a lifetime”

If you have came here for a sideboard guide and a new deck list you have came to the wrong place. If you are here to delve deep into the current state of magic and get into theory based reasoning you have arrived at the correct location.

Also proper grammar and such is not my strong suite and I don’t edit shit so the grammar police can probably find something else to do with their time.

“They want you to think inside the box, that keeps you in the confines of the game. Once you get comfortable outside the box is when you beat the rigged game”

Building a control deck is harder in 2026 than at any other point in history. This is an era of magic the gathering where the opposing cards are faster, leaner and more snow bally than ever before. The thing is you must adapt your deck building to compensate this. The power level of this game is going to continue to rise until the end of time. We are past the tipping point.

Lets take a look at the top 2 decks heading into the most recent Spotlight Series events. IN the left corner we have UR lessons and in the right we G/U badger mole cub. Both decks are products of this FIRE design philosophy and both are quite good. The trick here is how do you beat both decks that attack from various angles?

The cub deck is simple on the surface, some mana creatures, some big pay offs , a dash of card advantage and a searcher to wrap the room together.

Lessons is the harder cookie to crack, this deck can be an aggro control deck, a combo deck(Kinda) and a true on control deck.

Here’s something I think a lot of Magic players cant wrap their heads around. You only need to be 51% in the match up to be a law of large number favorite. Does this guarantee you a match win? Absolutely not, but to get “lucky” you need to be on the favorite side of the law of large numbers.

So when designing a deck that has a formula of card draw, answers and win cons you need to keep in mind how to be ahead of 51% or more of average draws to be a long-term winner. So let’s get into some of my choices for this event

4 day of judgment 0 ultima 0 split up

One of if not the most commonly asked question I get is why not Ultima? First thing first I don’t believe or respect the jeskai artifact deck. In my last 300 matches of this format I have paired into this 0 times. Yes I am fully aware that ultima cleans up earthbended lands, but heres the thing yes that’s cute and some free cheese I will glady scoop up. Having your wrath cost 5 mana vs 4 matters way more than getting a free stone rain or two. A common game play pattern in this match up is. Them, turns 1-3 develop. Turn 4 present lethal.

Our game plan is simple turns 1-3 ensure land 4 is coming on time. Turn 4 reset buttom. Turn 5 check the follow up board they will present. Turn 6 reset this all again.

Assuming the prior is what I want to do in each game vs them Elspeth and Marang act as better wraths that ultima could ever dream of being. You need cards that are multi-dimensional just like theres to keep up.

1 beza, 1 lantern No rip main

Lesson players are adapting to survive in the meta. 3 weeks ago graveyard hate was decent against lessons but now they have reconstructed the deck to be resilient to yard hate. I had main deck rest in peace until Friday but when you stop and think about the current meta game and the play patterns of the lesson deck RIP is almost a joke vs

them. This is part of the reason I don't believe in sideboard guides you can play against the same lessons 75 but 2 different players and you are supposed to sideboard differently passed on the particular play style. In my round 10 I didn't even bring in RIP vs lessons. He had no SCT and also played in such a manner that he was going to get that monument down the minute I slipped.

I came to beza and soul guide lantern to fill those flexslots because both cards are really flexible and give you extra percentages in match up your 60 isn't quite designed for.

You can not build your deck to target strictly a winner meta game, Lets be real for a minute Kaito and friends does not lineup very well into the current meta game. Yet I played against that strategy 4 times over the weekend. Tier 2 and beyond decks exists and you need plans and special tools in place vs these decks or they very well could end your tournament. I hate overlord of the mistmoors as a back up finisher but, there is not another card that hedges kaito and friends, provides card advantage and is a looming threat just quite like overlord so the card earns the keep.

Touching back to beza she fills multiple holes in the game plan while being your ace in the hole vs hired claw strats. Is 3 in the 75 too much? Maybe but Id rather have that type of card and not need it than need it and not have it.

The counter spell suite. 3 three steps ahead 4 no more lies

A lot of jeskai and UW decks only play 2 three steps. I liked 3 into the avatar meta personally. Yes cancel is an ass backwards of a card but this card has so mana more modes and is way more flexible than a cancel. While being one of the most sided out cards have 3 lets you use 1-2 early then have the checkmate button available later instead of the hard check.

Did you know that three steps has a clone mode? If we go back the play patterns of the cub deck if marang is our follow up wrath this now unlocks every three steps left into being a wrath but sometimes you get more and we take every drip of the gravy.

4 no more lies. To be honest this one needs no explanation and you often board some out when you are going long and have either upgraded your counter spell suite or you don't want to have dead top decks. This card was a tad rough on the mana but you are happy to have this tool

Designing the mana base and how this will change with Lowryn

A big advantage this deck gets over jeskai is the mana is so much smoother. You play less tapped lands and you get to play 10 basic lands. Sunspine lynx is a real magic card and one of the few plans reds has that actually makes sense vs you. Having access to the basics doesn't put you in awkward sports like what to do with your shock land on turn 4. Also being able to have utility built into the manabase will hedge vs flood. fountain port may seem innocent but that card is a real tool in multiple match ups. Jeskai has "utility lands" in the form of Cori mountain monastery and Mistrise village but 99% of Jeskai players play the village wrong in control mirrors. This is supposed to be your 9th land drop and not a minute sooner exposing the village to demolition field means your 7 mana commander card win condition is likely never resolving in the mana leak mirror.

Lowyrn gives the deck hallowed fountain and this is huge. On paper the easiest solution is 4 basics out 4 hallowed fountain in but I don't think that is the completely correct way to approach the mana. I still want access to the strength of basic lands not only to hedge vs Lynx but to also be able to make pain free land drops into the later turns of the game. We want to stay at around 7 etb tapped lands and shock lands counter for roughly 1/3 of a tapped land. The current list plays 7 tapped lands and once you add in shocks you are looking at 8.33 I think an anchorage or archive need to go both have their purposes so its honestly pilots discretion which way you go on the trim.

Why this deck as opposed to Jeskai?

Beyond the mana base concerns we discussed earlier I feel like helix and abrade are crutches. When those cards line up they are serviceable but when they don't the add more dead weight to a deck that will inherently have a percentage of dead weight in it. If you look through the 75 I played in atlanta you will find 0 copies of authority of the consuls. This is not by mistake the red match up is good enough that I don't think you need to dedicate precious sideboard space to such a narrow card. What I am getting at here is the extra points you may get against red cannot mathematically be worth what you re losing in consistency against the field. If abrade was a white card I would be

playing 1 or 2 but aang's iceberg does similar things to what you would want abrade for and keeps us into the beautiful mana base we have.

Jeskai Revelation is a trap! The format is faster than that off 2010, the threats are better and more sticky. Casting a cruel ultimatum is not a gameplan to bank on in this age (cruel is better than rev fwiw) Rev doesn't fit into any of the key turns that we have discussed so far. Elspeth and Marang fill the role of winning the game better than rev ever will. Im aware how "sweet" rev feels when you resolve it but for every one time that happens there are many more where a 7 mana card is rotting in your hand.

Plans vs lessons

This is a complicated one. The lessons deck can be built about 3 different ways and people pilot the deck a lot differently person to person. Depending on how the person I am across from play vastly changes how I position myself in the post board games. If you are playing against the guy who thinks the deck can only do one thing your graveyard hate and counters are way better. If you are playing against someone who thinks they have inevitability you need to prepare for a long war of attrition. A plan I am considering but have not had the time to test is to run a single Riverchurn in the board and go into the lessons match up with the mentality of no RIP and my goal is to stay alive by any means. If this happens I will be able to set a turn up for a one shot monument bang. The otter builds are better against you the pure lists so again your sideboarding should be liquid based on what you see and how they play vs you.

How does the deck Change with lowyrn?

Im obviously interested in spell snare. The card is very one dimensional but 2 is such a key number in curves and gameplans you need some number of this card. We touched on the mana earlier. I don't see a "lessons" deck coming out of lowyrn but the closest thing is maybe some version of five color elementals. The lists of that you will wont be refined enough to target specifically but maybe you could play some torpor orb in the board if you are really scared and want to hedge exactly that.

In conclusion, While I don’t think traditional style control has too much longer of a shelf life in Magic I think you can still continue playing the style if you are willing to put in the work to understand the play patterns and how adaptable you need to be in a given room. I do think this deck is good for Portland and the changes I would make to the Atlanta list are very minimal.

If you made it this far thank you this took longer than I expected and I am positive I left stuff out . I am hoping you learned something or thought outside your comfort box today