

Magic: The Gathering

Featuring Jon Finkel, A 1998 World Championship Finalist

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Wizo_Ruffle: I would like to introduce Jon Finkel, the 1998 World Championship finalist, he is going to talk to us today about building decks and answer your questions.

swjackson: So how did you get started out in **Magic**, Mr. Finkel?

JFinkel: I got started at the local game shop when I lived in England. I had always read lots of Sci-Fi/Fantasy, and had been vaguely interested in RPG's (Mostly through the computer). And walked into the shop, there were people playing, so I started.

Doc: What edition did you start at? **Dark**?

JFinkel: **Antiquities.**

swjackson: Mr. Finkel, what do you think about the Extended environment?

JFinkel: Well, extended is wide open for the first time in ages. People can kind of play magic again, which is cool. Extended uses any cards from 5th Edition on plus dual lands. If you look at Chicago and Seattle, it's obvious that there are a lot of different viable decks. Which is always the mark of a good, strong environment.

Walt: Which deck type is your favorite?

JFinkel: My favorite deck type from 1.x is a Monoblue creature based deck, but I'm not sure if it's the best.

Doc: All my friends started using speed red and sneak attack decks the only thing I find that works is uphill battle (all your opponents creatures come into play tapped) any other ideas?

Jfinkel: Well it all has to do with what type of deck you are playing.

Walt: I was wondering, do you have any advice on Squirrel/Plaguelord decks? I've needed help with one for type two. And, are Apprentice Necromancers any good for it?

JFinkel: I'm not personally a fan of uphill battle, as it has very little actual game impact except against sneak attack. In all honesty, I'm not that up on Squirrel Plaguelord decks, but I assume that they're in the 5cg mold?

Walt: It's more or less just a black control deck with a few green weenies including hermits.

JFinkel: It seems to me that the most important thing with all decks like that is consistency, you have such powerful spells that if you make it to the late game you'll be ok. So you would probably want elves and birds, along with making sure that almost all your lands

produce green mana. Probably about 22, because when you cast a hermit you are getting back everything you've lost from playing lots of mana sources.

Walt: And what do you think about Apprentice Necros? They work well with hermits, and Plaguelords, but I'm not sure if they're right for it...

JFinkel: I don't really like them. Because having cards that only work well with your already powerful spells without winning you the game are counterproductive. Once you have a hermit or a Plaguelord you're probably already in a good situation. So I'd rather have a card, which is better early, and helps you get to that point in the game. (This is a concept that comes up over and over again in deck construction like this, most often with decks like Recur or in control decks.)

swjackson: I have a mono-blue Extended counter deck but I have a problem getting out Morphling. What do you suggest running in it to boost its mana up a tad?

JFinkel: Well, Morphling is unique in Control decks because never before has a win condition been so easy to get out. But you have to remember that its primary purpose is still as a win condition. Which means that you usually only cast it after you are in control of the game. So rather than have mana acceleration, I think it's better to devote those slots to cards that are more defensive early in the game. Cards like cheap counters and kegs, etc.

Doc: Ok I had a counter deck and well I totally got rid of it because everyone would gang up on me in FFA's... so I built a Horseshoe crab hermetic study deck. I threw in some Somnophores with cloaks of mists... and now I am thinking of adding "free" like Palinchron and giant whale...should I, or what, add creatures after "free"? I added Karn and Crenellated wall and fog banks, but my deck is like 80 cards.

JFinkel: I must preface this by saying that FFA's aren't my specialty. But it seems like the most important concept in FFA's ends up being card economy. When you counter a spell in a 5 player game that doesn't directly affect one of your permanents, then you're losing out. Because you and the spell caster each lose a card, and the other 5 players don't. So of course decks like that won't do well. Rather, you want strong, defensive permanents, because they stay in play and are always useful. So with that in mind, I'd think something like Palinchron would be very useful, though probably not as good as Morphling.

Walt: I've been working on a white weenie/Armageddon deck that uses Remote Farms, and Ruins of Trokair to get the 'geddon off earlier. It uses Ramosian Sergeants and Gaea's Cradle to get out a lot of Steadfast Guards and such. I've been having trouble versus Masticore (obviously) and squirrels. I was wondering what cards you'd advise putting in, I considered Crusade, but there it seems like a dead card too often. But what about the Hermit? It's not too common I manage a 'geddon the turn right after it comes into play.

Jfinkel: Well, Armageddon is in itself a very good card vs both hermits and Masticores. So I'd think that Armageddon's combined with disenchanters should be a decent way to deal with Masticore. As for Squirrels, I think that your own Masticores might be a decent answer, especially with Gaeas cradles.

swjackson: What lands do you suggest running in a mono-blue counter deck, besides basic islands?

JFinkel: What format are we talking about here swjackson?

swjackson: Extended...

JFinkel: Ok. Well, I played a Monoblue Counterdeck in Chicago. And obviously chose to play the lands that I did because they seem to be the best to me. I played 12 Islands, 4 Thawing Glaciers, 4 Quicksands, 4 Wastelands, and 2 Dustbowls. Now 12 islands seems like a very low #, but I found that in practice it was enough with the brainstormers, impulses, and thawing glaciers.

swjackson: Good tech, Mr. Finkel, ty.

guest194: What do you think the best deck to play in extended is? And why? I read some articles on Newwave about u-g oath, Necro pebbles, pooh burn and replenish. How do they stack up?

JFinkel: Well, the best is a very hard question to answer, and I am not sure myself. The obvious answer would be Oath, since Bob Maher won Chicago and Seattle with it. But even in Seattle, Bob himself did not feel it was the best deck, and told me that he only won because of many mistakes made against him. Now the NecroCombo decks seem very powerful, but none made top 8 in Seattle, and only 1 did in Chicago. Anyway, it seems that for the first time in a long while, extended is a balanced format, without one obvious BEST deck.

swjackson: Ok, to Walt, on his problems against squirrels, if it's ok? Walt, I would suggest using kegs against those Squirrels, and fire at 0 counters. Makes a nice mess of their day.

JFinkel: Using kegs definitely sounds like a decent idea.

Walt: Do you think that Battle Squadron could be made to work in type two? I've been trying to find a way.

JFinkel: In short no, but I'll tell you why. Not only does it cost 5 mana, but also it is dependent on your having other creatures in play AND even then it isn't necessarily a game winner. Too often it's weak or useless, and is way too overcosted to be played in T2.

swjackson: What would you suggest as a good 1 casting counter? And don't tokens have a casting cost of 0?

JFinkel: I personally think that main deck force spike is preferable to annul because of its increased versatility, but I would definitely have 4 annuls in the sideboard of any blue deck. I'm not sure if the casting cost is 0, but I know that a 0 counter keg will destroy tokens.

guest199: Jon, do you think Necro was more powerful in Necro summer or in current 1.x

JFinkel: Definitely more powerful in Necrosummer, people just didn't build their decks quite as well, as they often did not have 4 consults. Without hymn or hippy, modern Necro cannot compare to old Necro however.

Doc: I was working on a deck for my best friend. It is a variation of Kai Buddes Japanese one.... but I took out a lot of stuff and basically make it so he gets a 6/5 flying (Covetous Dragon) like 3rd turn I have Masticores and Karns and a lot of mana producing artifacts wit voltaic keys and junk so my question to you is...should I add more land destruction or stick to the way I am at?

JFinkel: That's a hard question to answer. It seems to me however, that land destruction doesn't really belong in that deck except in the form of wildfire. With so much mana acceleration, you don't want to waste your few spell slots with relatively weak spells, but rather you want to play expensive, powerful spells. So Id say that LD does not belong.

guest207: Jon, do you still feel that you're the best player in the world? And aside from you, regardless of that, who do you think is the best player not counting yourself, and who do you think are the best upcoming players? (Hi all this is Mike Feuell L3 judge PT Webpage guy)

JFinkel: Well, your first question is almost impossible to answer, so I wont. The second one is almost as hard. So I'll stick to just listing who I think are the top 5 or so players besides myself. And they are SteveOMS, Kai Budde, Kyle Rose. Well, I think those 3 are better than most others at least, beyond that I'm not sure.

guest209: Are you or any other big name players going to be attending Origins this year even though nationals won't be there anymore?

JFinkel: Well, I myself probably will not be, but I cannot speak for anyone else.

Walt: What's your opinion on putting Thorn Elemental in a mono-green deck (basically stompy, type two)? And, why do you think Thorn Elementals aren't appearing in any popular decks anymore, when it first came out, it was huge.

JFinkel: Well, the problem with thorn elemental is simply its casting cost. No deck has ever done well that planned on CASTING a 7 mana creature, and no deck probably ever well. So with that in mind, I think that it is not a good idea.

guest199: Finkel I was wondering if you had a good e-dealer for me....oh yeah and how about that Shivan dragon?

JFinkel: I think that there are lot of good card dealers online, and while I think that the Shivan Dragon is a good card, its unplayable in constructed :(.

guest186: Well, my question is no longer that timely, but I wanted to know Jon's opinion on an extended deck choice, when the format is a LOT of beat down: hatred, red burn and then weirdness like green control and Palinflare: almost no oath, no Counterslivers.

JFinkel: Well guest, in all honesty, I don't know the answer to that question. I think that Oath, Necro, Necrocombo, and Monoblue are all good deck choices however.

guest216: A two part question Jon. Firstly, is it true that you know Dave Bachmann personally? And secondly, what's he really like?

JFinkel: Yes I know him, and he's a much more mature person now than he was 2 years ago.

Wizo_Ruffle: Ok, Jon any closing words for us?

JFinkel: Just have a good time. And I hope you're a St. Louis Fan.

Wizo_Ruffle: Let's all give Jon a round of applause and thank him for coming and talking to us tonight. I hope you will come visit us again :-)

WizO_Ginger: Yes, Jon, very informative chat.

JFinkel: OK. Good Bye everyone.