

Deck Deconstruction Seminar

Featuring Randy Buehler, Magic: The Gathering expert

Tues. March 14, 2000

TSRO WizO Durst: Welcome to the TCG forum. "March Is **Magic** Month" continues on WIZARDS.COMmunity with expert Randy Buehler's revival of a popular *Duelist* column, "Deck Deconstruction Seminar." Only this time, visitors get to select which deck Randy will examine. Just click on "More Info" to go vote on one of three decks getting played at the Malaysia Invitational.

Mike Online: Randy, did you write the *Classic* strategy guide?

Randy Buehler: The book on *6th Edition*--yep, that was me.

Mike Online: I thought so. I have that one. Are you going to write any other strategy guides?

Randy Buehler: They haven't asked again. Maybe.

Doscrash: So, Randy, what's it like being famous? Do you ever have a problem with being a celebrity? Do you walk into the grocery store, and the cashier goes, "Oh my god! It's Randy Buehler!"--and then there's a lot of commotion?

Randy Buehler: No grocery-store clerk has ever done that. Has one ever done that to you?

Doscrash: No, but I haven't won a Pro Tour.

Kyscu Drake: What titles have you won, Randy?

Randy Buehler: Pro Tour--Chicago Winner, Rookie of the Year, North American Type 1 Champion, and North American Extended Champion.

Doscrash: Have you ever been recognized in public for being a key **Magic** player?

Randy Buehler: Yeah, sure, I do get recognized. And no one ever gets tired of being asked to sign cards. [smiles] It looks like Standard won the poll. Is that indeed what everyone wants me to talk about?

Doscrash: Yes, but it's just because Regionals are coming up.

Doscrash: Randy, do you pronounce "WotC" like it rhymes with "Yahtzee"?

Randy Buehler: "WotC" does rhyme with "Yahtzee," doesn't it?

Mike Online: Sorry, I'm a newbie. What's a "WotC"?

TSRO Wizo Arkana: "WotC" is "Wizards of the Coast."

Randy Buehler: I guess I'll start with an overview of Standard and then I'll go to queued questions and answers.

Guest 428: Randy, what do you consider the best archetype in Standard right now?

Randy Buehler: It seems to me that the best deck right now is Bargain, but no one likes to play it. It's being held in check by a weird sort of professional courtesy. Since no one likes playing it and no one enjoys playing against it, most players pick up something else whenever they go to a tournament. The thing is, though, that once people start playing Standard with something on the line (like in Regionals, Nationals, or Worlds), the gloves come off. Meanwhile, Stompy is an excellent deck. Gaea's Cradle and Rancor are two of the most broken cards in Type 2. Boa and Albino Troll are amazing creatures, so Stompy is going to stay a very important part of the metagame. Of course, at the invitational itself, the only 3-0 deck was Accelerated Blue.

Guest 431: But doesn't Massacre put a big damper on Weenie decks?

Doscrash: Heh, heh, good old Zvi

Randy Buehler: Zvi's deck used Grim Monolith to bust out fast, big creatures (like Morphling and Palinchron) along with Treachery and Stroke of Genius. Those plus Counterspell are Blue's good cards. Meanwhile, Keg and Masticore give you some nice control elements. The Boston guys trotted out two decks that have apparently done pretty well in the Grudge Match tournaments: Ponza and WW. WW with rebels and Cradles is pretty good. Lin Sivvi is the best card in the *Nemesis* set, in my opinion, so the Rebels are going to be around for quite a while. Ponza I've never entirely understood, but they must think it's good. Okay, that's a brief overview of where I think the metagame is. I'll field questions from the queue now.

Mike Online: Will those *Nemesis* preconstructed decks do any good in a tournament? My son says they just sell them to have more stuff to sell. (I guess he means to suckers like me!) I thought they were built by great deckbuilders.

Randy Buehler: Those decks are not intended to be top-level tournament decks, no. They are usually built around sound ideas and can be improved into decent decks, but with only two rares and however many uncommons, plus with only *Masques* and *Nemesis* cards, there are limitations to what even the best deckbuilders can build. To be fair to the preconstructed decks, they play an important role of giving casual players a prebuilt deck to have fun with and/or to see cards from the new set.

Guest 417: What do you think of Control Green in Type 2?

Randy Buehler: Green certainly has a lot of good, expensive cards, and Control Green could do well, but I find that Stompy is better since the cheap, aggressive green cards have come out and even better than the slower, control-ish ones. Control Green could do well in the right metagame, but you'd have to know a lot about the metagame to know that it's going to do better than a deck with (slightly) better cards.

Guest 431: What do you think of the Ashnod's Altar-Fecundity-Saproling Cluster Combo deck? Could it be viable in Standard?

Randy Buehler: Yes, it could be. As a member of R&D, I'm actually scared quite a bit by that deck. It's a cheap combo, it's all in one color, and the deck doesn't seem that hard to make work. I haven't seen one put together and shuffled up yet, but I certainly expect to. One weird thing going on at the invitational is that no one wanted to show off their best technique because this is the same Standard that will be used at Nationals. Plus, the next Pro Tour is the first one with *Nemesis* in constructed, so people probably kept their *Nemesis* technique under wraps.

Pikablu 819: Do you think the rapid release of expansions by Wizards of the Coast will have any effect on Standard tournament play?

Randy Buehler: It's the same release schedule Wizards of the Coast has been using for years. Sure, it impacts tournaments, but it impacts them the same way every year--although this year is a bit different since U.S. Nationals are earlier than usual (they're in early June instead of in July), and thus *Prophecy* won't be legal yet. That'll make Nationals a little different--metagaming will be more important than innovating, but it means innovation will be more important at Worlds. I kind of like the way the environment gets constantly shaken up. When I was playing and building decks all the time, I felt that things might get stale if there was only, say, two sets a year.

Doscrash: Is the current tournament field all paper-scissors-rock? Does each deck have a deck that can beat it and a deck it can beat? Which decks do you think have the best match percentages verses others? In other words, what beats what and how often?

Randy Buehler: I never believe that it's rock-paper-scissors. If things are down to just three decks, then you can always find some fourth deck that can beat the other three. (There's always a "hand grenade.") As for right now, I think Bargain has the best set of winning percentages. You have to take the time to learn to play it properly, but when it's in the hands of a practiced, good player, it seems to win the most.

A-Mar: Doesn't it seem that every deck, with the possible exception of the evil bargain, needs multiples of Port, Keg, or Masticore? Does anyone else see this as a little redundant, inbred, and boring?

Randy Buehler: Yes, A-Mar, I agree with you. Those cards were mistakes--they turned out to be better than R&D thought they were. In the future we are going to try not to print artifacts or colorless lands that are that good. I'll do my best to make sure things are interesting in the future. [smiles]

Doscrash: I'm just curious, but before you made a name for yourself, how did you build up your card collection?

Randy Buehler: I was an addict! I couldn't stop myself from buying cards. Seriously, though, I drafted a lot. I think draft (and sealed-deck) are the best ways to acquire cards. It's fun to play, and you get to keep cards that may not be exactly what you want, but you can usually trade them for what you want if you work hard enough. I started playing around *Homelands*, but I traded up to a set of Power 9, for example. The other thing with draft, the way I look at it anyway, is that you can usually get three packs for six to seven bucks by buying a

box at a time. So you spend \$7 on a draft, which gives you three hours of fun. It's about the same as going to see a movie, *plus* you get these cards to keep.

Guest 431: It seems that R&D is straying away from printing efficient multicolored mana sources, so Standard is becoming more and more mono-colored. Is this trend going to continue?

Randy Buehler: No. Like I was saying to A-Mar, they didn't do that on purpose. I think it's the good artifacts that cause mono-color trends, by the way. Since Masticore and Keg give creature-destruction to every color, there's no reason to splash a second color in your deck. If we can stay away from hyper-efficient artifacts and not give every color a way to plug its weaknesses, then that should naturally force people to go to multicolor. When *Destiny* rotates out this fall and *Invasion* rotates in, things will be a lot different.

Doscrash: Describe a typical day at your job. What time do you have to get up to go to work? Where do you work at Wizards of the Coast?

Randy Buehler: I get up at 8, get to the office at 9, and usually stay until 6 or 7. Some days there are a lot of meetings, in which three to five of us go over a card file and argue about the cards we're thinking about printing. Other days I just sit around and play "future decks" all day. I thought the job would be a lot of fun, and it turns out it is. When we play **Magic**, it's usually Standard--but one year into the future. For example, we had *7th Edition* and *Planeshift* rotate into our league last week. Once or twice a week we draft or play sealed-deck with whatever set is under development.

Kyscu Drake: Please explain what "draft" is.

Randy Buehler: "Draft" usually means booster draft. Eight people is the optimal number, but it works with different numbers. Each person sits down with three booster packs, and then you each open your first pack, draft a card, and pass the rest to the guy on your left. You then receive a pack with fourteen cards left from the guy on your right, take a card, pass the rest, etc., until all the cards are gone. Now open the next pack, but this time pass to the right. Then the third pack goes back to the left again. You get as many lands as you want, and you build forty-card decks.

Mike Online: So what are the expansions after *Invasion*?

Randy Buehler: *Invasion* is the fall stand-alone. The first expansion next year (coming out around February) is called *Planeshift*, and then the second expansion (the June one) is called *Apocalypse*. After that I can't say.

Doscrash: When you started working for Wizards of the Coast, did you have a vision of where you wanted to see **Magic** go in the next few years? If you did, do you think R&D has done a good job considering or incorporating your ideas?

Randy Buehler: I certainly had (and still have) a lot of ideas about what is good for **Magic** and bad for **Magic**. When I got here people started listening to me right away. I was pretty happy about that. I

would say that yes, many of my ideas have been incorporated into the next block and I'm really looking forward to watching what happens when it comes out. (Note that the first set I got to work on is *Invasion*.)

Guest 437: What do you believe the dominant deck type using the *Masques* block will be, with a view into the third *Masques* block set?

Randy Buehler: "Rebels" has to be the dominant/defining deck. Lin Sivvi is probably the best card in the block right now, and the Rebels are really good. That doesn't mean they will automatically win the Pro Tour or anything, because people know about them. But I certainly think that when you build a block deck you have to think about the Rebels and how you're going to deal with them.

Pikablu 819: If you are allowed to, can you describe possible rules changes/additions when *Invasion* or *7th Edition* is released?

Randy Buehler: There isn't really anything I'm allowed to tell you right now. There will be new mechanics in *Invasion*, of course, but I can't tell you what they are. With *7th*, there are no major changes planned (it won't be like with *6th*).

Doscrash: Do you still have to buy cards like a normal person, or do you get them for free now?

Randy Buehler: Well, mostly I build decks with cards that haven't been printed yet, so I build decks out of proxies--we have these special, blank **Magic** cards with fronts you can write on. I don't really need any real cards, so I haven't acquired any. If I wanted them, though, there's a company store where I can get something like \$1,000 worth for free each year. After that I'd have to buy them myself (but I'd get a discount).

A-Mar: About the invitational--is there a chance some of the cards other than Pikula's will see print?

Randy Buehler: Hmmm. There's a chance, sure. There were some interesting ideas, but I don't think you'll see any of the others in exactly the form in which they were submitted. Was there one that you think we should print?

A-Mar: Null set, and the 5c land (pay life).

Randy Buehler: Yeah, I kind of liked the land, too. I'll bring it up with the other R&D types.

Mike Online: Last question on the expansions: what will be the block name for *Invasion*, *Planeshift*, and *Apocalypse*?

Randy Buehler: I guess it'll be called the *Invasion* block, but I haven't really thought about it. (I told you I was happy with my job.)
[smiles]

Doscrash: Do you think that there could be cards made outside the **Magic** game, such as something like, "Non-active player gains priority until end of turn"?

Randy Buehler: One of the best things about **Magic**, in my opinion, is the flexibility of the game and the rules. You never know what we're going to print next. When we come up with really wacky ideas, we just save them up for *Unglued*. So the answer to your question is "anything is possible."

Kyscu Drake: What does "phasing" do? Is it the same as fading? And what new abilities are you guys looking to add with these new expansions?

Randy Buehler: Phasing is not the same as fading. Phasing was used back in the *Mirage* block. A permanent (usually a creature) with phasing leaves play at the beginning of the turn. Meanwhile, all of your permanents that were "phased out" come back in.

Mike Online: How do you find the artists for the cards?

Randy Buehler: I'm not involved in finding artists. We have a whole Continuity department devoted to things like finding the artists and developing the storyline. They also do most of the work toward naming the cards and the mechanics--things like that.

A-Mar: Do the invitational results show that mono-color is viable in Classic/Vintage/Type 1? And kudos to recent sets, with Type 1-caliber cards (e.g., *Spiritual Focus*) that make it so.

Randy Buehler: Mono-color is viable, but it's really hard to resist the allure of all of the broken cards. I know that Pat Chapin showed up planning to play mono-blue with *Thaw*, but he felt he needed to splash *Pyro* and *Blood Moon* to have a chance against *Donate*. So I guess it's viable, but it's only the right thing to do if you're playing *Necro* (Control *Necro*, anyway). I'll pass along your kudos and recommendation.

TSRO Wizo Arkana: Well, Randy, that is it for the questions. Do you have any closing remarks to make?

Randy Buehler: I enjoyed doing this, and we plan to make it a monthly event. I'll probably enjoy next time even more, because this Malaysian flu should be gone by then!

TSRO Wizo Durst: Thanks for your time, Randy. We appreciate it.

TSRO Wizo Arkana: Thank you for coming here, Randy. It's been nice having you here.

WotC Mel: For April, Randy invites you to choose one of these **Magic** Standard-format decks: *Stompy*, *Rebel.dec*, *Bargain*, *Mono-Blue Control*, *Mono-Brown*, and *Chapin.dec*.

Randy Buehler: Goodbye, everyone.