

TCG Forum: Deck Deconstruction Seminar

Featuring Randy Buehler, resident Magic expert

Tuesday, June 13, 2000

WizO_Arkana: Welcome to the TCG Forum for the Deck Deconstruction Seminar with Randy Buehler. He will be deconstructing U.S. Nationals decks. Randy takes a look at the players and the decks that made it to the Orlando, Florida U.S. Nationals this year.

WotC_Randy: The winner of the poll was Pat Chapin so I'm supposed to talk about what he chose to play at the U.S. Nationals last weekend. Well, he didn't show up. So that part was easy! There are two big stories that came out of last weekend: 1) Jon Finkel is back; 2) Mike Long got DQed from the Draft Challenge for insufficiently randomizing his deck. Finkel went 6-0 in the draft and then did well enough with his mono-black control deck to run the table in the top 8. Long, well, Long has now finally been nailed for cheating. There were a very healthy variety of decks in the top 8--seven different deck archetypes. All in all I think the weekend went very well and it will turn into two pretty good ESPN2 shows. I'm now willing to field questions about Nationals or anything else you want to ask me.

guest31: What do you think is the best *Prophecy*[™] card?

WotC_Randy: You may not believe me right now, but if you look back three or six months from now I guarantee you'll see lots of people playing lots of Chimeric Idols. It's a 3/3 for three mana (which previously only green had) and it gets around Story Circle and it basically can't be killed by Sorceries (like Wrath and Hammer).

micronta: how do you qualify for the U.S. Nationals? Is it related to the Pro Tour or Grand Prix circuits?

WotC_Randy: There are several ways to qualify: 1) The top 8 from each U.S. Regional are qualified (Regionals were back in April and there are 12 or so in the U.S.); 2) The top players with Pro Tour points are invited (so if you do well on the Pro Tour you get invited); 3) The top people with DCI Composite ratings are invited; and 4) There were 5 "meatgrinder" tournaments the day before Nationals where the Top 4 from each qualified. So that's how the field was chosen.

megathonii: "Meatgrinder"? What is that?

WotC_Randy: "Meatgrinder" is the nickname for the series of single-elimination qualifier tournaments for the U.S. Nationals that are held the day before Nationals start. I believe the real name is the U.S. Opens. Three were Standard Constructed and two were Sealed Deck.

witch_king: How did the judges determine Long was stacking his deck?

WotC_Randy: First they watched his shuffling technique--he did pile shuffles and then one push through shuffle at the end. That looked a bit suspicious since pile shuffling alone is not a randomization technique--if you know how the deck started out then you can predict what happened after a pile shuffle. They confiscated his deck (and his

opponent's deck) for a deck check after they presented them to each other. When they looked at his deck it didn't look random--it wasn't perfectly sorted but there was no way to cut him such that he would get a bad draw. That might happen just by random chance but when you combine that evidence with his poor shuffling technique and the prior warning on his record for exactly the same offense, it all adds up. So that was the evidence. And the result was a DQ without prizes.

Krome: what do you think *Prophecy's* most useful red card/combo is?

WotC_Randy: Probably Rhystic Lightning--4 damage for three mana at instant speed is awfully good and you can usually manage to catch your opponent tapped out. One fun thing to try is Veteran Brawlers (he's the rare 4/4 for two mana that can only attack if your opponent is tapped out). Its best use is as a wall. Since you can control whether or not you are tapped out, he makes a great turn 2 play that can hold off your opponent's early creatures.

Krome: Well I found Veteran Brawlers and Citadel of Pain a good starter.

witch_king: What makes up the "trinity" in Trinity Green?

WotC_Randy: I don't think "Trinity" actually means anything. It's probably because three guys got together to build it, or maybe even three teams. So I'm not really sure--it probably means something to whoever coined the name, but I don't know what.

micronta: Is pile shuffling by itself actually illegal in tourneys or is it allowed?

WotC_Randy: The rule says you must sufficiently randomize your deck. You can shuffle however you want and there are no rules against pile shuffling, but pile shuffling alone is not actually a randomization method so you must do something else in addition (usually riffle shuffling).

megathonii: Where would a person look for various tournament formats?

WotC_Randy: the DCI™ Floor Rules for **Magic®** include rules for all the major tournament formats. You can find them on Wizards' website on the DCI page.

quest31: Have you heard of the shirking moog combo thing?

WotC_Randy: No . . . I haven't heard about that one. There are lots of combos that are possible in Magic. That's one of the cool things about the game, but not many are good enough to play in tournaments. The key to tournament decks are speed and consistency . . . you need more than just a nifty combo.

magicdigipoke: What cards are we talking about for deckbuilding?

WotC_Randy: Well at Nationals the format for Day 2 and for the Top 8 was Standard Constructed. That's the most common tournament format and in Standard you can use cards from *Urza's Saga™*, *Urza's Legacy™*, *Urza's*

Destiny™, Mercadian Masques™, Nemesis™, and Classic™ (Sixth Edition). *Prophecy* becomes Standard legal on July 1.

Krome: Are there any *Prophecy* cards you see soon becoming banned from tournament play? I've got several decks that allow me to kill one opponent every turn after the sixth or seventh. For example, *Lifeline* and four dual Natures with *Kjeldan Champions* and *Avalanche Riders*

WotC_Randy: I don't think we'll need to ban any *Prophecy* cards. Usually if a deck can't win until the sixth or seventh turn it isn't actually a problem. Most opponents can find some way to defend themselves or bust up your strategy if you give them six or seven turns.

micronta: Can *Karakas* return itself to its owner's hand?

WotC_Randy: No, I don't think so. I'm not a rules expert, but I believe "Legend" only refers to creatures--*Karakas* is a "Legendary Permanent" (specifically a *Legendary Land*), but not a "Legend."

Iaiks: Both *White Knight* and *Pearled Unicorn* are 2/2 creatures, but the *Knight* costs one less mana and it has protection from black and first attack, versus no abilities from the unicorn. Does that mean the *Unicorn* has become obsolete and will be forgotten?

WotC_Randy: Well *White Knight* has two colored mana in its casting cost, whereas the *Unicorn* only has one. Still, you are correct that *White Knight* is a lot better than *Pearled Unicorn*. Does that mean the *Unicorn* is obsolete? Yeah, maybe. Some cards are just better than others.

megathonii: Are they going to be marketing any more tournament decks like they have in the past?

WotC_Randy: What Wizards normally does is market the Top 4 decks from the *World Championships*. *Worlds* is coming up in August in Belgium so you can look for those decks to come out in September or October. At least, I think we're still planing to do them (I haven't heard of any plans to cancel that program). The decks will never be as good as they were in 1998, though . . . that was the year one of the decks was mine! ;-)

witch_king: What's your opinion on the rulings for *Lin Sivvi* and *Port*?

WotC_Randy: I agreed with them 100%--the cards are just too good in *Block Constructed*. *Port* might even need to be banned in *Standard*, I'm not sure. And we might need to ban another *Rebel* (the *Sergeant* perhaps) in *Block Constructed*, but only time will tell.

witch_king: I agree also . . . overpowered cards make game play unexciting and not diverse enough.

WotC_Randy: True . . . that's why we have a banned list.

micronta: *Karn* is a *Legendary Permanent* but also a creature, do you know if *Karakas* can return him?

WotC_Randy: Yes, *Karakas* can return him, because he is a creature.

Iaiks: What can I do against a Royal Assassin? When it comes into play I just cannot attack any more.

WotC_Randy: What you need to do is include creature-destruction spells in your deck. What color(s) do you normally play?

Iaiks: White.

WotC_Randy: White has a bunch of cards that can deal with him, including Afterlife, Arrest, and Swords to Plowshares. Try trading for one of those and putting it in your deck.

megathonii: You can use cards that have protection from black, too.

WotC_Randy: Good point.

megathonii: Where can a person go to find deck ideas and find counters for decks like Sleigh?

WotC_Randy: There are a number of good websites that are devoted to decklists and deck "technology." My favorites are www.thedojo.com, www.newwave.com, www.wizards.com/sideboard, and www.starcityccg.com.

guest31: Are Qualifiers for Pro Tour - New York this Saturday?

WotC_Randy: Yes, there are still a couple weekends of Pro Tour - New York Qualifiers. I believe Neutral Ground has one this weekend and Grand Prix - Pittsburgh is next weekend. (Pro Tour - New York is a team Pro Tour, by the way, so those are three-person team Limited Qualifiers.)

brassman131: Suppose you play with a deck that revolves around Armageddon and very large creatures, and as far as lands go, you use the Mox Pearls and Mox Rubies. Could you put more than one Mox card down at once?

WotC_Randy: Well Moxes are "restricted," which means you are only allowed to play one of each Mox in your deck. So no, you can't really make that deck work.

micronta: Do you really think it's necessary to ban Dark Ritual in Extended? I've always considered it a staple in any black deck . . . fast mana is one of black's strongest qualities.

WotC_Randy: Well, fast mana is thought to be too good. Just like the Moxes had to be restricted, so did Dark Ritual have to be banned. Yes, it was a staple, but now black will need to find other things to do. It still has plenty of powerful cards (like Necropotence and Phyrexian Negator). Yes, I think it did need to be banned.

Krome: I find it's just as easy to use Bubbling Muck now as Dark Ritual.

WotC_Randy: Bubbling Muck can be just as good in the mid-game, but it clearly isn't as good on turn one. That's when Ritual was its scariest-turn one. The others aren't quite as powerful. I think Wizards will shy away from printing cards like them in the future, but for now we'll

just wait it out since they aren't quite as good as Ritual or Mana Vault. (Keep in mind that Ritual is still legal in Standard, it's only banned in Extended.)

micronta: Then they should also be banning cards like Grim Monolith, Thran Dynamo, and Voltaic Key, not to mention Mana Vault.

WotC_Randy: Well, we did ban Mana Vault!

micronta: In Type 1?

guest31: Are there going to be foils in *Seventh Edition*[™]?

WotC_Randy: I'm not allowed to tell you what will be in Seventh Edition--you'll just have to wait and see (sorry).

megathonii: I doubt if you know anything about this but is MicroProse going to be doing anything more with Magic for the PC?

WotC_Randy: I have no idea, sorry.

witch_king: Why does Wizards ban cards that don't necessarily throw off balance in game play (i.e. Dark Ritual)? I agree it needed banning because of the three for one but the real root of the Dark Ritual banning was because Necropotence came out too early . . . I also think Necro needs to be at least restricted.

WotC_Randy: Our debate was about whether to ban Dark Ritual or Necropotence. We decided that Necro was a more interesting card that led to more interesting decks so we decided to ban Dark Ritual instead. The root of many problems since Extended is not so much Necro, but fast mana--that's why we banned Mana Vault too--to get rid of the last of the super-efficient fast mana.

micronta: Banning Dark Ritual is like banning Swords to Plowshares. You're taking out a staple card of the game.

WotC_Randy: Note that we did stop printing Swords to Plowshares. It was a staple because it was super-efficient. The same is true of Dark Ritual--it was too good (even better than Swords to Plowshares).

Krome: I don't see any difference between Dark Ritual and some accelerated green.

WotC_Randy: The difference is one of power level. Both Dark Ritual and, say, Elf or Bird are really good, but the Ritual is a bit more explosive while the Elf is a bit more fragile. The same was not true of Elf, or Swords to Plowshares. If the same had been true of Swords then we would think about banning it too.

brassman131: Can you use an artifact's ability when it first comes into play? (I've heard two answers to that question and I would like it clarified.)

WotC_Randy: Yes, you can use an artifact's ability as soon as it comes into play. Artifacts don't have summoning sickness (unless they are artifact creatures).

guest31: Can you give out the list of new foils for Friday Night Magic?

WotC_Randy: I don't have that list and even if I did I probably wouldn't be allowed to tell you (sorry).

micronta: What about Wild Growth, Overgrowth, Eladimri's Vineyard? These cards can produce lightning-fast mana and all exist in Extended play and are not as fragile as the Elves.

WotC_Randy: Like I said, we keep a close eye on the decks that are dominating tournament play. Whenever a card is being played by almost everyone, we talk about banning it. None of those cards are getting played nearly as much as Dark Ritual was. And that's because Dark Ritual was a better, more fast, more efficient form of mana acceleration, not just because more people liked it.

Iaiks: Can the Royal Assassin destroy a Wall?

WotC_Randy: If it becomes tapped somehow, then yeah, sure.

DarkelfBG: If a shadow creature gains flying, can it be blocked by creatures with flying or only other shadows with flying?

WotC_Randy: Only a flying shadow could block it (and there aren't many of those!).

witch_king: I asked this question earlier . . . Dust Bowl: I still don't get it . . . 3 (can't be used until turn 4), tap it, sacrifice a land (trading one land for another, and all this to destroy one of their lands . . . and that's only if it's non-basic. I've been playing for a long time and Strip Mine was so much better. That's not my argument though . . . Dust Bowl costs a whopping 10 dollars where as you can go buy a Strip Mine for at the most 4 dollars . . . it just doesn't add up to me.

WotC_Randy: Well Strip Mine was so good that it is banned from every format except Type 1 and it's restricted there. Dust Bowl isn't even as good as Wasteland, but Wasteland was too good too. In addition, both Strip Mine and Wasteland were uncommon so a lot more of them were printed than Dust Bowls (which is rare). If you want to play Standard right now and you want to destroy non-basic lands, Dust Bowl is your best option. In addition, it's a pretty good option. Since it can go into any deck (it only requires colorless mana), that makes it a hot card --> \$10 price tag.

Iaiks: Do you think Aladdin's Lamp and Aladdin's Ring cards are useless for being so amazingly expensive, and adding little help? (Lamp 10, Ring 8)

WotC_Randy: The biggest thing is probably that most people play Standard, where neither Strip Mine or Wasteland is legal. I think the Ring is pretty good in Limited, but probably too expensive for Constructed. Still, some people have fun trying to build decks that are

capable of casting them. One easy way to get them out is with Tinker. Mostly, though, they're too expensive for top-level tournament play.

WizO_Arkana: OK. Well, I have nobody else in the queue. Randy, do you have any closing remarks?

WotC_Randy: Tune in to ESPN2 on June 20 to see the Pro Tour - New York finals . . . with yours truly doing play by play. And keep an eye on the *Sideboard*[™] (www.wizards.com/sideboard) for coverage of upcoming Magic tournaments, including Worlds.