

# ATB's White Midrange Write-Up

I've been in love with Mono-White Midrange ever since the release of Kamigawa: Neon Dynasty gave us the package of 4-6 cards that make up its core. The following year gave us Ossification and Lay Down Arms, which have marked themselves as some of the best removal spells available in Standard today. However, after the meta shifted away from black-based midrange and into tempo and ramp strategies, and with the ban of Reckoner Bankbuster from Standard, Mono-White Midrange has never been the same. Since the ban of Bankbuster, I have spent most of my time on MTG: Arena playing White Midrange in Explorer, tuning the deck into what I now believe is a legitimate dark horse of the format in the current meta. Here, I present my analysis over the last seven months of playing through the Explorer ladder and hitting Mythic every season.

## *Why Play Mono-White Midrange?*



[Moxfield Link](#)

In all honesty, the biggest reason I started playing Mono-White, outside of its loss of viability in Standard, was because the best deck in the format happens to be the same deck that Mono-White was created to beat in Standard - Rakdos Midrange. Between the high-value enchantments like Wedding Announcement and The Restoration of Eiganjo that black and red struggle to remove, and a powerful creature in Steel Seraph that isn't hit by their primary removal spell in Go for the Throat, we already have a recipe for success against the best deck in the format. Outside of Rakdos, we have decks like Mono-White Humans and UW Spirits that

just fall apart against all the cheap exile-based removal and lifegain that white can provide in a midrange shell. In essence, we have a deck that out-grinds Rakdos much in the same vein of Keruga Fires, without the downside of auto-losing to the aggressive decks in the format.

In Mono-White, you get access to extremely powerful exile-based removal spells such as Lay Down Arms, Skyclave Apparition, and Farewell. These can hinder many powerful cards in the format such as Kroxa, Titan of Death's Hunger and Arclight Phoenix, as well as prevent incidental recursion from cards such as Takenuma, Abandoned Mire. White also has access to many value engines on hard-to-remove permanents, such as Wedding Announcement and The Wandering Emperor, allowing you to build up a board state over the course of multiple turns that can be difficult for an opponent to handle after a point. Between being mono-colored and having cards that can fetch your basic lands out of your deck, you gain access to a significant amount of utility lands, and our deck runs ten of them.

There are many lines of play that build up a surprising amount of power on the board all at once. The ideal curve of Thraben Inspector > Ambitious Farmhand > Restoration of Eiganjo > The Wandering Emperor > Regal Caracal puts you in a winning position by turn 5, with a board full of threats that can be overwhelming for an opponent to remove, much less get through with attackers. The deck stalls very well in many circumstances, and with the ability to run 30 lands in an 80-card deck while actively pulling lands out of your deck, your top-decks become much better than your opponent's on average. Your cards work as synergy pieces as much as they do value pieces, with tokens from Caracal or Restoration being buffed by Wedding Announcement, Seraph providing extra keywords to creatures with vigilance, lifelink, or flying, and Yorion blinking a stalled board to grant you 3-4 cards and a bunch of extra tokens. As long as you don't die in the first few turns, you have an extremely synergistic pile of cards that is resilient to removal and provides absurd amounts of value, allowing you to come back from many situations.

This, of course, presents a core problem with the color white, and therefore the deck...

## *The Challenges of the Build*

Searching through your collection in MTG: Arena for 2-mana white creatures that fit into a proper midrange strategy can prove extremely difficult. Many two drops in white are aggressive creatures made to attack or provide disruption - Thalia, Guardian of Thraben is an amazing play on turn 2 in an aggressive deck full of creatures, but isn't particularly helpful when our powerful spells are enchantments and planeswalkers. Likewise, cards like Thalia's Lieutenant, Luminarch Aspirant, and Resolute Reinforcements fit much better into aggressive strategies than those that wish to stall the game. Cards like Regal Bunnicorn and Raffine's Informant are the closest you'll get to real threats in the 2-drop slot, but need specific shells built

around them that we can't utilize too well (and in the case of Bunnicorn, our deck doesn't go wide quickly enough to make it the threat Tarmogoyf has been in the past for midrange). This leaves us playing 1/1 cantrip creatures such as Farmhand and Companion in order to get some value, chump block, and hope we can blink later in the game with the use of our companion, Yorion, Sky Nomad.

The deck features some other core problems as well. For a good long while, the deck that sat alongside Rakdos Midrange at the top was Mono-Green Devotion, and boy was that a deck to try to beat. Slanting the deck to beat Devotion was difficult - we needed more exile-based removal and a clock, which could certainly be done in white colors. However, by giving up the grindy nature of the deck to present a clock for Mono-Green, you are playing a poor-man's version of Humans, while still giving up too many points to Rakdos. Many times my deck left Yorion in the collection in favor of playing a more streamlined, 60-card decklist, and each time I lost to Rakdos Midrange I cried a little bit on the inside. But by going back to 80-cards and a slower, grindy plan, we could never hope to kill Green before they would combo off with Karn and Nykthos.

In this meta of Mono-Green Devotion, many decks rushed to beat it. Finding a balance between surviving decks like Boros Convoke and Boros Heroic while being able to take games from Keruga Fires and Rakdos left us stretched thin. How much removal do we run? Are top-end cards like Sanctuary Warden and The Eternal Wanderer worth it, or do we have to forego those in order to play more early-game threats and defenses. Which bad instant-speed removal spell are we running? Fateful Absence doesn't exile and gives the opponent a clue token, but at least it's only two mana. March of Otherworldly Light exiles, but costs a lot more mana than we're willing to give. How do we stop from getting blown out by Sacrifice and their thousand pings onto our 1/1 creatures? And then there's the Control players running around too with Teferi and sometimes Lotus Field. How do we provide any disruption at all to a control strategy without any creatures for us to remove? These were the many questions that had my decklist bouncing back and forth, constantly changing and adapting to find some way to push through.

In the end, I settled with accepting losses to Mono-Green Devotion, Rakdos Sacrifice, and Boros Heroic in favor of tuning the deck to beat Rakdos Midrange, Mono-White Humans, and Boros Convoke. Cutting instant-speed removal, the deck boasted a 59% winrate combined against those three decks, while suffering as low as 23% against Mono-Green Devotion. This isn't to mention the dark days that were the Appraiser Combo. And then, our saviors came...

## *LCI and the Combo Ban*

The release of Lost Caverns of Ixalan brought along a new instant-speed white removal spell in Get Lost. Initially, I was skeptical of this card's viability in midrange. While it seemed

like a great card to play in control decks, how much of a cost was two map tokens? The thought of removing a Sheoldred with Get Lost, only to watch the Bloodtithe Harvester become a 5/4 the next turn horrified me. But the upside could be great... removing Teferi, Hero of Dominaria from UW Control on turn 5 could increase the amount of time I had to close out the game against them. Killing Mayhem Devil before the opponent can set up a board state where its sacrifice effects are helpful can be the difference between living and dying on turn 4-5. Destroying Greasefang at instant speed meant we were no longer dead in the water against the deck. Of course I had to try it, and it was an extremely successful test. Immediately I saw my Sacrifice and UW Control matchup winrates increase - from 46% vs UW Control to 55%, and from 41% vs Sacrifice to 49%. These significant increases made me wonder just how much better the deck could be if Mono-Green didn't exist, though being able to kill Karn or Kiora the turn they came down was a godsend and helped that matchup slightly as well. My prayers were answered regardless...

Not long after the release of Lost Caverns was Karn, the Great Creator and Geological Appraiser banned from Pioneer and Explorer. This meant the days of stressing out against a turn one Elvish Mystic were over. Once again, I watched my overall winrate increase, and the climb back up to Mythic became a breeze as I watched the new meta unfold in front of me. Rakdos Midrange was back in full swing, meaning our deck's purpose was fulfilled immediately. Farming Rakdos players with a deck that can out-grind them fills my heart with glee, and reminds me of playing White vs Grixis in standard during All Will Be One. But Rakdos wasn't the only deck on the rise...

## *Sideboard Guide*

Each of the decks listed below will have some numbers next to it out of ten. This is the difficulty of the matchup in my eyes, with 1 being a free win and 10 being an instant loss. The format shows both in game one and in post-board matches, so (6 > 5 / 10) means that it's a 6 in difficulty in game one, and a 5 in difficulty in games two/three. It is important to note that in general, 80-card decks have a lower impact on matchups from their sideboard due to the inconsistency to finding your key hate pieces.

### **Rakdos Midrange (3 > 4 / 10)**

As discussed throughout this piece, our deck is primarily designed to defeat Rakdos. Their only avenue of winning the game tends to be similar to how they would win against Mono-Green Devotion - attack our hand aggressively, remove every creature they see, and swing

in as much damage as possible each turn. If we aren't dead by turn 6, usually our powerful value-generators turn online and can swing the game in our favor. Our biggest goal is to survive, usually this means throwing away an entire Wedding Announcement full of 1/1s with chump blocks to prevent us from taking a ton of damage, and focusing on removing Sheoldred the Apocalypse and a flipped Fable of the Mirror-Breaker. Once we can comfortably resolve Farewell, Regal Caracal, or Serra Paragon into a returned creature, the state of the game becomes much more favorable.

+2 Divine Smite  
+1 Tocasia's Welcome  
+1 Elspeth Resplendent

-3 Skyclave Apparition  
-1 Serra Paragon

In sideboarding, we want to focus on our survival. Divine Smite can exile many of their creatures, including their Hive of the Eye Tyrant. Tocasia's Welcome prevents us from getting destroyed by their hand-hate, and Elspeth Resplendent allows us to catch back up on board with yet another powerful threat that can drop a Wedding Announcement or Bankbuster and help us get our value game going. It also helps to threaten opposing Liliana of the Veils, which can be a nuisance if it sticks around and especially if it uses its ultimate. On the flip side, Skyclave Apparition tends to be a liability here, being unable to block favorably and being removed very easily to every removal spell available to them, so we cut it. We also cut a copy of Serra Paragon - after all, the card becomes a removal magnet without much else before it to eat a Go for the Throat. After sideboarding, the matchup becomes a little more difficult, since our sideboard is more dedicated to other matchups and theirs is naturally set up against us due to many of the cards brought for Control also doubling as effective sideboard cards against us.

### **Izzet Phoenix (5 > 2 / 10)**

Izzet Phoenix is the second most popular deck on the Explorer ladder at the moment, and it's also a favored matchup overall, just not in game one. The general game plan is to play out our early game creatures, remove Ledger Shredder on sight with Get Lost, and save our exile removal for Phoenix. We can afford to play the long game, since our tools are enough to stop them after a certain point, but if the opponent can return two or three Phoenixes in the first three or four turns, it can present a large problem that we may not be ready for. Our MVP cards tend to be Wandering Emperor, Lay Down Arms, and Farewell. Focus on gaining life with Steel Seraph's ability to grant Lifelink and you should be fine for the most part.

+2 Rest In Peace  
+3 Deafening Silence

-4 Wedding Announcement  
-1 Reckoner Bankbuster

Generally, the 1/1 ground creatures from Wedding Announcement don't matter to us too much since all of their creatures fly. The extra card draw can be nice, but the card is awfully slow overall for a matchup where we need to be aggressively removing things. Thankfully, white has access to the best possible hate cards against Phoenix, completely shutting down their graveyard strategy and their ability to pop off. Unlike the Rakdos matchup, this matchup becomes significantly easier after sideboarding and it goes from about even to extremely favored. The game plan now revolves around resolving RIP, Deafening Silence, or both, and then removing every threat they play after. Just watch out for those giant Crackling Drakes...

### **Azorius Control (5.5 > 6 / 10)**

I would say that overall, this matchup stays nearly the same in difficulty pre-board and post-board. It's slightly unfavored, but not so much that you're stressed about the matchup. The general game plan for game one is to play around Make Disappear with your card advantage engines (Wedding Announcement and Bankbuster), play something they need to counter on turn four to prevent them from casting Deluge comfortably, and beat down with your cantrip creatures. Get Lost should be saved to remove Teferi as soon as it comes out, especially if the opponent attempts to windmill slam him on turn 5 without protection. We can afford to play a longer, grinder game, but the key is to keep pressure up during said game or a single resolved Teferi or Shark Typhoon can end your whole day.

+1 Reidane, God of the Worthy  
+1 Tocasias's Welcome  
+1 Elspeth Resplendent

-3 Skyclave Apparition

Much like in the Rakdos matchup, there's far too much removal and not enough important targets for Skyclave to be effective. We dedicate very few sideboard spots to this deck, as without heavy skews it would be difficult to make this a more favorable matchup for us. It is certainly far from unwinnable, as our card advantage engines can provide more than theirs if Teferi doesn't stick. The increased number of counterspells from the opponent, such as Dovin's

Veto, can be a problem, but as long as you keep up a creature or two on the board and don't dump your hand and play into Farewell, it's definitely a fun game to play out.

### **Amalia Combo (3 > 2 / 10)**

The new hotness on the block, Amalia Combo's reliance on both small creatures and the graveyard make them the perfect prey for our deck. The small caveat is that the version that runs Aetherflux Reservoir can be significantly more difficult to beat, as we can no longer rely on allowing them to combo to clear their own board before killing Amalia and full-resetting. We are able to grind through hundreds of health points if necessary to kill them, though most of the time these games are won by the opponent drawing out their deck to multiple explore triggers from their combo. Even in the worst possible situation, we can force a draw by using The Wandering Emperor's +1 to prevent Amalia's board wipe, causing the combo to go infinite and resetting an otherwise unwinnable game. Keep up either Emperor or Get Lost at all times, remove Dina, Soul Steeper on sight, and you should be able to grind them out in a long game.

+3 Temporary Lockdown

+2 Divine Smite

+2 Rest In Peace

-4 Wedding Announcement

-3 Reckoner Bankbuster

We really don't need our card advantage engines to beat them, and instead we should be bringing in ways to prevent their combo. Rest In Peace prevents their graveyard recursion through Return to the Ranks, Temporary Lockdown can remove their wide boards (just watch out for Knight of Autumn!), and Divine Smite is an instant-speed tool to either prevent the combo or kill the Amalia after the combo. Stick to your plan, and don't forget that you can force a draw / reset the game with Wandering Emperor in a pinch.

### **Boros Convoke (8 > 5 / 10)**

This matchup ends up hinging on the amount of removal you draw in the first few turns. Removing any and everything in the early game is crucial to prevent their deck from spiraling out of control. As we've stated, White Midrange tends to get run over by extremely wide strategies where nothing is an amazing target to hit with removal, and unlike other aggressive strategies their ability to bounce back after removal is impressively dangerous for us. Definitely trade every single chance you get, don't let them keep creatures, and if you can win game one then the match gets a lot easier for you...

+3 Temporary Lockdown

-3 Reckoner Bankbuster

... assuming you can draw into Temporary Lockdown. This card is your one savior in this matchup, and drawing it wins you the game almost immediately. While they can recover from single-target removal, removing 4+ creatures and artifacts at a time can prove devastating for them. Of course, we take out Bankbuster because we don't have time to sink mana into it for cards, we need to spend every mana we get surviving.

### **Rakdos Sacrifice (9 > 6 / 10)**

Another deck that can kill you extremely quickly, except this time you're relying on having your exile-based removal, one of which is very dangerous to play in Skyclave Apparition vs all their removal. The first step to beating them is removing Mayhem Devil on sight, but sometimes in later turns they can combo off and kill you in one go with a flipped Fable + Mayhem Devil the turn it enters the battlefield. They can easily kill off all your 1/1 creatures and ping you to death. Gain as much life as possible so that if they get a turn where Mayhem Devil lives, you have a chance of surviving the burst of pings. Expect to lose every creature you've ever played and ever loved.

+3 Temporary Lockdown

+1 Reidane, God of the Worthy

+2 Divine Smite

+2 Rest In Peace

-4 Wedding Announcement

-4 Serra Paragon

This gets significantly easier after sideboarding, so take a deep breath. Making sure their Devil never sees the light of day is always the priority, so Divine Smite comes in as extra instant-speed exile removal against it. Temporary Lockdown deals with the vast majority of their permanents, from Witch's Oven to artifact tokens to Cauldron Familiar. Rest In Peace prevents Cat-Oven shenanigans, but also has the upside of stopping Kroxa if their deck is running it. Last but not least, your ace in the hole is Reidane, God of the Worthy. The front side is worthless, but the backside, Valkmira, Protector's Shield, almost guarantees that you win the game if it hits the board. Not only does it tax your opponent's ping effect from Devil, but it also fully prevents the damage from going through (prevents 1 damage - therefore all of it). If this deck were more popular, I would immediately add more Reidane to my sideboard. As for what we take out,



Wedding Announcement tokens are likely to die as soon as they hit the board, and Serra Paragon doesn't do much with a Rest in Peace on the board, as well as being a removal magnet for the deck that can most easily trigger the Revolt of Fatal Push.

### **Gruul Sagas (5 > 6 / 10)**

‘ This is a fairly even matchup in game one, with their aggression being better than Rakdos but their ability to grind being noticeably worse. As usual, bolt (LDA) the bird, and then use a combination of Wedding Announcement tokens and cantrip creatures to chump block until you can get some valuable things on the board to save you. Unlike the Rakdos matchup, Skyclave becomes a necessity, denying their permanents while giving you a body to chump with as their removal suite isn't the best. Skysovereign, Consul Flagship isn't the house against us that it is vs Rakdos, as we're less focused on any individual creature and more focused on the sum of the parts. Still, vehicles can be difficult to remove. Notably, Farewell spells death for the opponent almost immediately.

No sideboard changes.

Our sideboard is not built to handle this deck. As they will probably have something to bring in such as Rending Volley, this will inevitably get more difficult. If the meta were to include more Gruul, I would include Loran of the Third Path in the sideboard.

### ***Closing Thoughts***

As it stands, Mono-White Midrange has a close or favorable matchup against the top four decks of the current Explorer metagame. Once the full scope of Pioneer is printed into Explorer, the deck will probably struggle against the likes of Lotus Field Combo due to the inability to present a clock against the opponent and the light amounts of disruption available. This write-up will be updated as I continue my way through the Explorer ladder, but for now I highly recommend this deck to anyone wanting a change of pace from the top four of the format.