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Normally when you go to a Prerelease event, you are looking at cards for the first time. Each new cardboard rectangle represents a world of untapped potential, and it is up to you to determine if that potential is worth fulfilling or not.

Is this card good? Will it work in my deck? Can I figure out a clever way to abuse this?

Many of you asked these questions of your new cards last weekend; as a player in my "previous life" I asked the same questions when I was playing in such events. Just as many of you were awed by the powerful new Spirits, so was I awed at Guiding Spirit from *Visions* many years ago. Just as the splice mechanic got many of your mental wheels turning, I remember gazing upon a card with buyback for the first time. It's a great sensation, that of discovery, and one that I wish I could capture again.

For me, you see, Prereleases are now no longer filled with wonder, but rather relief. Seeing cards finally printed after designing, developing, playtesting, and arguing about them for the better part of a year seems to me like the moment of birth of a child following a particularly long and grueling labor. And I wasn't even formally on any of the teams involved with this set or any set in this block, for that matter; I just chipped in from the sidelines with ideas and data, yet I still feel connected to this set because it was this first one I saw formed in its entirety from within R&D.



I attended the Seattle *Champions of Kamigawa* Prerelease this past Saturday to get a first-hand look at players' first experiences with the cards, plus to get a few games in myself by "gun-slinging." Gun-slinging is a term we use for playing for prizes--a bunch of us from R&D were there lined up at a big table playing all comers, and anyone that beat us in a sealed deck game received a free booster pack. As usual, TO Tim Shields was fantastic, and it was great to get out and play against and talk to all the fine opponents that sat down across from me.

My deck:

Champions of Kamigawa Prerelease		
Main Deck		
<i>40 cards</i>		
8 Forest	1 Burr Grafter	2 Befoul
1 Mountain	1 Kami of the Hunt	1 Kodama's Reach
7 Swamp	1 Kashi-Tribe Reaver	1 No-Dachi
16 lands	1 Kokusho, the Evening Star	1 Pull Under
	1 Matsu-Tribe Decoy	1 Sensei's Divining Top
	1 Nezumi Cutthroat	1 Soulless Revival
	1 Order of the Sacred Bell	1 Strength of Cedars
	1 Orochi Ranger	1 Wear Away
	2 Orochi Sustainer	1 Yamabushi's Flame

1 Sachi, Daughter of Seshiro
 1 Sakura-Tribe Elder
 1 Scuttling Death
 1 Villainous Ogre

14 creatures

It was pretty darn good. I only gave away five booster packs in an afternoon of playing, and two of those were to players I know to be Pro-level. Not a bad day's work.

As I mentioned earlier, looking at a set of newly-released cards has a different feel for me than it does for the average player. A new card really isn't "new" in my eyes, since I've grown quite familiar with all of them over the past year. Fanning through cards from *Kamigawa* was like looking at a photo scrapbook of your child's life on his graduation day. Oh, the memories!

I thought I'd share some of the stories of these cards as they came flooding back to me while I built my deck. Let's call it a walk down memory lane, sealed-deck style.

Befoul, perhaps the best black common for limited, is one of the two strict reprints I mentioned in my column on reprints a few weeks ago. Of course I was wrong in saying there were two reprints since there are in fact three: Befoul, Stone Rain, and the one I forgot about—Lure. The Arcane subtype allowed us to make new cards out of old cards by simply giving them the subtype—Waking Nightmare is arcane Mind Rot; Quiet Purity is arcane Demystify—increasing the number of not-quite-strict reprints.

The "creatures damaged by this" ability on many Snakes, including **Orochi Ranger** and **Matsu-Tribe Decoy**, was originally on a lot more cards and was going to have its own keyword—"Stun." When it was decided that every Moonfolk would fly and have a "return land" ability and that every Samurai would have bushido, we decided to tone down other "strict rules" about what each creature type did. Hence, many Snakes lost the "stun" ability in favor of new abilities, and the need for a keyword went away. Note that there is one rare legendary Snake in the set—Shisato, Whispering Hunter—that actually stuns *players*.



Orochi Sustainer was "Llanowar Snake" for a good part of development, meaning it was a 1/1 that could tap for . Many long discussions were had about the pros and cons of having a card like that and Llanowar Elves (which we knew we'd be bringing back in *Ninth Edition*) in the same Standard. Additionally, some members of the department could not accept the idea that a random Snake would be given the same powerful status as the long-loved Llanowar, so in the end we decided to back off and model him after the less powerful Wirewood Elf.

There is still a fantastic "mana producing" common Snake in the set, however, and that is **Sakura-Tribe Elder**. We called this guy "Rampant Snake" or "Rampant Growth Guy" in development for obvious reasons. So many of our green decks



You're going to be seeing a lot of this guy

contained four of this card and four Eternal Witnesses during playtesting that we had to come up with a name for the "opening" of Rampant Growth Guy on turn two, "Regrowth Guy" on turn three. RG then RG... We decided to name it the "Gutschera Opening," since its initials matched that of our co-worker Robert Gutschera, the Director of (Non-**Magic**) TCG R&D. Robert was flattered by the honor, if a bit confused.

Keeping with the Snake theme, we come to **Sachi, Daughter of Seshiro**, one of the few uncommon legendary creatures in the set. During design, there was a huge debate about the role of legendary

creatures at uncommon. The "pro" argument was that legends were going to be the focus of the set, and it's hard to make a theme stand out if all of its components are rares. The people in the pro camp are the ones responsible for Pious Kitsune, which mentions a particular legend by name in its text, and the variety of cards that reference other legends in their names, such as Kumano's Pupils and Hisoka's Defiance, which help solidify the "This Set Is About Legends" idea. The "con" camp thought that putting legends at uncommon would make legends overall feel lamer. After all, those of you that remember Chandler from *Homelands* know how lame he was. A compromise was reached, and only four legendary creatures were put at uncommon, which was the minimum number we felt was necessary to make the theme stand out in limited play and to people that are only opening a few packs.

One card I am particularly fond of is **Kodama's Reach**, partly because I am a fan of mana acceleration and color-fixing, and partly because it is one of the few cards in the set that I designed. This card, combined with Rampant Snake, can give green-based decks access to just about anything they want to toss in.

The one off-color card that I did toss into my deck was **Yamabushi's Flame**. Many of the red cards in this set remove the creatures they damage from the game (Kumano, Master Yamabushi is the headman of this cult), which helps to alleviate many of the headaches the spirit world can give removal. The "RFG" clause stops soulshift and the abilities of Dragons quite nicely.

One card that was opening a lot of eyes at the Prerelease was **Sensei's Divining Top**. This little artifact might not look like it does much, but for a small mana investment you get a pseudo-Sylvan Library that is almost impossible to destroy. Add in some shuffle effects (see Sakura-Tribe Elder and Kodama's Reach above), and the card selection this thing generates can get out of hand. The Top let me cheat on land by one. I kept many one-land + Top hands and always hit my third drop.

Order of the Sacred Bell is one of my favorite cards in the set (I have learned to appreciate simplicity since working here). Its message is simple: green's Hill Giant hits harder than any other color. Fantastic and efficient.

Villainous Ogre is one of the many "Ogre-Demon" cards that appear in the set. You may have noticed that the set has a bit of a "tribal" feel, similar to *Onslaught*. This wasn't a conscious goal of the design team, but rather a natural end-result of trying to create a set that revolves around flavor. Creatures help their own kind in a time of war, and tribal interactions make the most sense from a storyline point of view, as opposed to a mechanical one.

One card that did a lot of good work for me was **No-Dachi**. Yes, it feels weak compared to its *Mirrodin*-block equipment counterparts, but it may actually be better in limited than most common equipment from the previous block. Few people are running any artifact destruction, which means your equipment will stick around forever, most likely. There will be no Unforge after blockers have been declared! Our decision to continue equipment into this block is one that I love, since I feel equipment cards are some of the most flavorful we could do in a fantasy-based card game.

Kami of the Hunt is what we call a "spiritcraft" creature, meaning one that triggers when a Spirit or Arcane spell is played. This mechanic also almost got a keyword—"Tatari," which was Japanese for "curse," specifically a spirit-world curse. We eventually chickened out on the keyword, mostly because we had never keyworded a trigger condition before (that, and people thought the word was a little too weird) and ended up giving it a less-cool nickname (spiritcraft). In retrospect, I think we would have been happier had we left it there.



Finally we get to the big man, **Kokusho the Evening Star**. We had a tough time figuring out what to do with these Dragons. At first, they were all going to have colored firebreathing, but that had two problems. One, many people don't like "☠: +1/+0" on a card, even a blue dragon, since blue doesn't get firebreathing. Two, the art that came in didn't show any of them breathing anything. The next iteration of them had "attack triggers," but that felt too much like the dragons from *Invasion*. Finally, we came up with the "dies" triggers. These fit well, since these Dragons are supposed to be really smart, and would want to do everything possible to ensure their own survival. I think they're some of the cooler cards in the set.

Well, there it is. All that came out of one forty-card deck! That's encouraging to me; I guess I'll have plenty to talk about this year!

Last Week's Poll

Which new mechanic interests you the most:		
Splice	8187	40.0%
Flip Cards	7149	34.9%
Bushido	2692	13.1%
Soulshift	1227	6.0%
"Spiritcraft"	1222	6.0%
Total	20477	100.0%

This Week's Poll

Did you attend the Prerelease?

Yes, to play.
 Yes, to judge.
 Yes, to hang out.
 No.

