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Monday, October 18, 2004

The last couple of Limited Information columns have been dealing with the sealed deck format and whilst I do plan on returning to that before the end of this PTQ season I thought I'd change gears slightly and switch back to draft for this week's column. This is still relevant of course as the Top 8 of the current PTQs are run using Rochester draft so you still need to know how to draft if you want to win that slot.

I'm not going to devote a whole column to Rochester draft at this point in time as it's pretty easy to sum up. Due to the fact that all of the cards are seen and everyone's colour preferences are known fairly early on in the draft it tends to be a bit more cooperative than booster drafts are. It's rare for two players sitting adjacent to each other to be drafting the same colours and if they are they'll probably be going home early, as they'll be fighting a lot over the best cards. One of the main keys to winning in Rochester is simply to be drafting the most under-drafted colour at the table. If white is very strong then you might be doing well to be one of only three white drafters but similarly if red is very weak then being one of two red drafters might not be a good thing. Figure out how many players each colour can support and try to be in the colour that's being drafted by fewer players than you would expect.

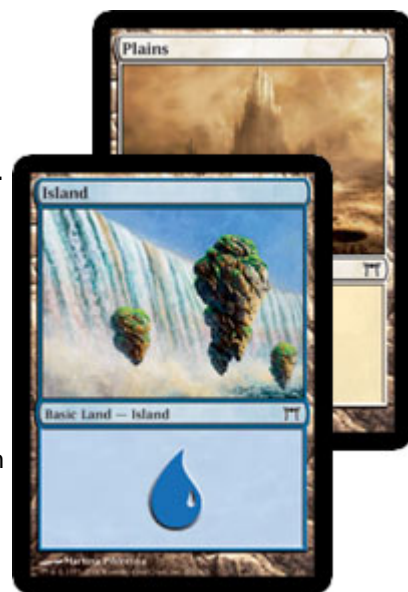
I've mentioned cooperation because it's key in Rochester as you do not want a neighbour turning on you and taking away your best picks out of spite. If you're drafting green-black it's usually wise to let them have that 11th pick Kami of Ancient Law when there's nothing in the pack for you just so they might return the favour.

Today I'm going to talk about a draft archetype that always manages to rear its head in every block but that is one of my favourite already in this format: blue-white.

## Drafting blue-white

The above colours have been drafted together probably since draft was invented, but the relative power of this combination has obviously risen and fallen during each block. Typically it relies on an ability to stall the ground and win with flyers backed up by an occasional Pacifism-style removal spell and damage prevention trick. More often than not it can be quite a slow archetype as it favours defensive ground creatures and can take its time winning with a lone flying attacker. In *Odyssey* block cards like Mystic Zealot and Dreamwinder held the ground whilst Aven Flocks and Aven Windreaders won the air battle. Kirtar's Desire and Shelter were the spells of choice there.

*Onslaught* block made it much harder for blue-white as two common creatures – Sparksmith and Timberwatch Elf – often spelled game over if they hit the board in the first couple of turns. With Lavamancer's Skill complicating things further still, blue-white often had nothing they could do against such cards with Pacifism as its main removal spell and little in the way of bounce. Indeed, blue was often paired instead with red to take advantage of Lavamancer's Skill whilst white was frequently paired up with black in the form of a Cleric tribal deck. Both of these solutions gave answers to the problems of Sparksmith and



Timberwatch Elf as you at least had the possibility of having the appropriate red or black removal spell in hand.

You might well ask why I'm giving this short history lesson. It's because, in part at least, it demonstrates some of the reasons why blue-white is looking particularly strong in this block.

First, there are no commons that just wreck you in this block. There's no Sparksmith, no Timberwatch Elf and no Spikeshot Goblin that will single-handedly ruin your otherwise pleasant day. Frostwielder exists but it is slow and often doesn't do too much damage by itself. On top of that you do have a permanent common solution to it in Mystic Restraints, which is a much better removal spell than it looks on the surface.

The second thing to note is that we have one of the best 'Pacifisms' printed in a while in Cage of Hands. You can just throw this out there whenever you have a minute and if something scary turns up the majority of the time you'll be in a position to return the Cage and drop it down on whatever nasty critter shows up. Having both Cage and Restraint in the common slots gives blue-white two very good 'removal' spells, which it doesn't normally get. Combine this with the fact that they both get around the Soulshift ability and can target both Spirit and non-Spirit creatures alike and you've obviously got a couple of winners. Blessed Breath and Consuming Vortex are respectable tricks too and can provide card advantage due to the Splice mechanic. Similarly Indomitable Will can generate a significant advantage as it often leaves behind a creature that's a lot tougher for your opponent to deal with than the original problem they were trying to solve.

The thing I like most about this combination in *Champions of Kamigawa* however is that it works best when it's being aggressive. Although the aggressive version of this deck can be a little reliant on Kami of Ancient Law for it's 2-drop it can also pick up some goodies from the uncommons or rares such as Samurai of the Pale Curtain or Konda's Hatamoto and it has Soratami Cloudskater and even Floating Dream Zuberu which give it something to do on the second turn when it needs them.

It has excellent third turn plays in Kitsune Blademaster, Kabuto Moth and Soratami Rainshaper, and then it can follow up with an abundance of excellent flyers from turn four onwards. Both the Moth and the presence of Indomitable Will can make blocking decisions difficult and it's often possible to have a good number of flyers in the deck meaning that your air force can make quick work of any opponent who can't race you on the ground. In the mid-late game the common Soratami Mirror Guard and Soratami Mirror-Mage in the uncommon slot can provide ways to speed up your victory.

## Rating the commons

I'm going to run through my pick order for the commons in this archetype, as I believe it will help you understand how I personally think this deck is best drafted so far. It should be noted that these pick orders only apply for the blue-white combination so please don't infer that I'd always place Kami of Ancient Law ahead of Mothrider Samurai!

### Creatures:

- Kabuto Moth
- Kitsune Blademaster
- Teller of Tales
- Soratami Mirror-Guard
- Kami of Ancient Law
- Mothrider Samurai
- Soratami Rainshaper
- Soratami Cloudskater
- Hundred-Talon Kami

Kitsune Diviner  
 Devoted Retainer  
 Floating Dream Zubera  
 Kitsune Riftwalker  
 Harsh Deceiver  
 River Kaijin  
 Kami of Twisted Reflection  
 Kitsune Healer  
 Callous Deceiver  
 Kami of the Painted Road  
 Lantern Kami  
 Hisoka's Guard  
 Pious Kitsune  
 Silent-Chant Zubera  
 Wandering Ones

Kabuto Moth sits on top of the list simply because it provides a very powerful effect for a very cheap price. It makes blocking decisions very difficult and when they don't block you can just choose not to pump and then it makes attacking a bad option for your opponent too. Combined with the second pick on the list it means your opponent has to muster up at least a Moss Kami before they can even think about blocking. I rate Kitsune Blademaster above the flyers as it's equally capable of sitting on defence and discouraging all but the hardest of attackers while your flyers finish the job it started.

Teller of Tales is definitely the best blue creature on the list as it provides a large body along with a solid ability. You don't often have many Spirits in your blue-white deck although you'll likely have a few but you will probably have an Arcane spell or two to go along with them. You can cast a Spirit post-combat to untap a creature for blocking duties or you can cast an Arcane spell during an opponent's combat step to tap a would-be attacker. Of course there are the really unfair situations where you bounce one attacker with a Consuming Vortex whilst simultaneously untapping your Blademaster to block and kill a second attacker. The Teller has a nice ability tacked onto a substantial body and he rates above the other blue creatures.

The Mirror-Guard comes in next. Although its one toughness makes it a little fragile I value it higher than the other flyers because it has a higher power and it can force through some additional damage in the mid-late game with its ability.

The most questionable aspect of this list is most likely going to be the placing of Kami of Ancient Law ahead of Mothrider Samurai and Soratami Rainshaper. This is simply because this deck wants to be aggressive and the Kami is the only common 2-drop that allows it to do so. There are lots of alternative common flyers but nothing that successfully replaces the Kami as a second turn 2/2. A second turn Kami backed up by Kabuto Moth or Indomitable Will can get through a fair amount of damage and even un-aided it'll deal some damage against anyone with a slower start and then usually trade with something. The enchantment kill aspect of the Kami shouldn't be overlooked either as it can often take out an annoying Shrine or free up a better creature from an opposing Restraint or Cage. Overall though the high ranking of the Kami isn't an indication that I consider it a better card but instead it's simply an indication of its importance to this archetype.



Everything above Devoted Retainer I'm very happy to play main deck. Kitsune Retainer might often get boarded out but it's usually an acceptable main deck card. I'd like it so much more if it could attack for one though. Anything below Kami of the Painted Road I wouldn't normally ever consider for the main deck. Lantern Kami might make it in if I was very short on early creatures. The cards in the middle of that pack are all very average for the most part and often their selection would be dependant on your mana curve and other commitments.

### Spells:

Cage of Hands  
Indomitable Will  
Mystic Restraints  
Blessed Breath  
Consuming Vortex  
Call of Glory  
Counsel of the Soratami  
Reach Through Mists  
Eye of Nowhere  
Sift Through Sands  
Hisoka's Defiance  
Quiet Purity  
Thoughtbind  
Terashi's Cry  
Ethereal Haze  
Peer Through Depths  
Vigilance  
Psychic Puppetry  
Lifted by Clouds  
Field of Reality



The top three cards of that list are basically what you're looking for here. I rate Blessed Breath slightly higher than Consuming Vortex largely because of the one mana discount but also because it has a much cheaper Splice cost. Both are perfectly acceptable though and the Vortex is a decent way of dealing with a lot of cards such as opposing Cages and Restraints as well as Serpent Skin and Uncontrollable Anger. This deck is often tempo oriented so you're definitely happy to run a couple of Vortex if you can get them.

The value of some of the other cards depends greatly on your deck. Call of Glory is great when you've got a heavy Samurai bias but that is more typically found in red-white decks rather than blue-white. If you've got three Blademasters, Nagao and a couple of Mothriders then by all means run it. Reach Through Mists is another card that can increase a little in value if you've already picked up Blessed Breaths and Teller of Tales. Certainly it can move ahead of Call and Counsel in the right

deck.

Hisoka's Defiance is the borderline between playable and unplayable I think. Cards like Thoughtbind and Quiet Purity are better left in your sideboard and brought in when needed.

Ethereal Haze I definitely don't consider playable. This deck aims to win quickly and put your opponent on the defensive and Ethereal Haze is a very situational card. Blessed Breath is far more flexible and Candle's Glow is a superior damage prevention effect. Haze is only ever really useful when you're in a race situation or to trump a combat trick from an opponent but even then it's never going to be spectacular. If you're the one doing the attacking you'll much prefer to have a Breath or even another random creature when your opponent throws some blockers or removal spells your way.

Rather than list all of the commons in a big list I'm just going to give you my top ten so you can see how the spells stack up against the creatures. I'll reiterate here again though – this list is only applicable for drafting blue-white. In other colour combinations the ranking of the cards in both colours may well be different.

### **Blue-white draft top-ten:**

1. Kabuto Moth
2. Cage of Hands
3. Kitsune Blademaster
4. Teller of Tales
5. Indomitable Will
6. Mystic Restraints
7. Soratami Mirror-Guard
8. Kami of Ancient Law
9. Mothrider Samurai
10. Soratami Rainshaper

*Champions of Kamigawa* will hit **Magic Online** pretty soon now so I hope this article has helped give you a little insight into drafting what I believe is one of the better colour combinations in this set.

Good luck to everyone competing in the remaining PTQs!

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