

Top 10 Champions Combos

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I like lists. I'm sure everyone does really, especially people who play **Magic**, as they typically will have a logical mind and putting things in lists is a very logical thing to do. Given that this week is Top 10 Week I hope you like lists too because you may well see one or two!

Before we start, I want to give some feedback on the results of the poll I ran a couple of weeks ago asking for opinions on what formats this column should cover.

Here are the results:

How much Sealed Deck coverage do you want during this PTQ season?		
I prefer an even balance between Sealed Deck and draft articles for now.	1648	36.6%
I'd like a very heavy emphasis on Sealed Deck during this Limited PTQ season.	841	18.7%
An occasional Sealed article is fine, but I'd prefer most articles to be on drafting during the PTQ season.	831	18.4%
I would like to see mostly Sealed articles during the PTQ season, but still some draft articles.	658	14.6%
Stick to draft please.	530	11.8%
Total	4508	100.0%

So most of you want an even balance and with an almost 50/50 split between those who favour draft and those who favour sealed I think that's the route we'll be taking. Over the course of a year I would imagine the split to be slightly in favour of drafting but when the limited PTQ season rolls around I think it makes sense to switch the bias in favour of sealed deck for a few weeks. You'll still be seeing the draft pick articles of course, and I'll throw in some general strategy ones and other topics as well to mix things up. I think it makes sense to focus on the format that most people are playing though, so if draft is your thing please be patient as the focus will move back to that soon.

So, back to this week!

It's a refreshing change for me to get to tag along with a theme week and to make the most of it. I'm going to bring in another theme from a couple of weeks back that I missed out on – combos! During that week I was busy discussing the *Champions* pre-release so it was a little early to start discussing any particular cards in the set. Now that everyone has had a chance to see and play with the set I think it's as good a time as any to go through some of my favourite combos that I've found whilst playing with the set.

In general, whenever a new set comes out, it's always worth looking through to see if there are any cards that have obvious interactions. There are some that are made for you to notice such as Pious Kitsune and Eight-and-a-Half-Tails but there are usually some not so obvious ones as well. On top of that there are always a few cards in each set that initially look pretty weak on the face of it but that can often turn out to be very powerful. Cards like Devouring Greed fall into this category for example. On initial inspection this card does very little by itself but when you actually play with the set full of Soulshift guys, Zuberass and Spirit tokens you realise that it's playable. When you finally draft the right deck that it works in you realise that it has the potential to be very nasty indeed.

When looking for combos it's best to find those which use cards that are perfectly playable in their own right. It's only when you put these good cards together that the sum of their parts becomes much greater than the whole. Noticing these interactions means you can modify your valuation of a particular card and perhaps draft it a little higher simply because it works very well with other cards you've already drafted.

All of the interactions I'll be going through today I've drafted myself. I'm going to avoid using rares as they won't come up very often but I recently had the Horobi, Death's Wail + 3 x Kabuto Moth deck, and needless to say I had a lot of fun with that one. I'm sure there are plenty more combos I haven't listed but it's up to you to discover those. Some of these will be obvious and some not so obvious, but they're all amongst my favourites from the new set.



10 - Reach Through Mists and Glacial Ray

This one won't be new to most people but I dare say there are a few readers who still haven't played with the set much or who haven't familiarised themselves with the main mechanics yet. This is one of the best common combos in the set to take advantage of the Splice onto Arcane mechanic. Simply put, having Reach Through Mists alongside the Glacial Ray means you can cast the Reach and add the Ray's effect to it by paying the Ray's Splice cost of $\{1\}$. The Glacial Ray stays in your hand and you get to draw a card and deal two damage to a target for the very nice price of $\{1\}$. The Splice mechanic can be used to generate a lot of card advantage over the course of a match so pay attention to your Arcane spells when drafting. These two cards together demonstrate that very effectively.

9 - Strength of Cedars and Kodama's Reach

Here we have a great example of two cards that obviously work well by themselves but when put together are truly excellent. Strength of Cedars is one of the more amazing uncommons in the set and I've lost several games to it already where it was basically the only card that would win the game in that situation. However, it does have a fairly high casting cost and it obviously gets much, much better when you have a high number of lands in play. Clearly the best way to get to that point is with Kodama's Reach. An excellent accelerant by itself, it will get you the lands you need to be able to cast the Strength and will most likely get you to the point where the Strength gives +6/+6 or even higher. All that's left is to find an unblocked creature and an opponent who looks like they have a few more life points than they really need!



8 - Matsu-Tribe Decoy and Indomitable Will

By itself, Matsu-Tribe Decoy is a reasonable creature. Its ability can be useful and it can force an opponent to keep a crucial one toughness guy in their hand when played early. By itself though, it isn't really capable of doing too much damage and often when you do use its ability your opponent can double block it and inflict the necessary three damage to kill it. Basically, it needs a little help. Indomitable Will is the perfect companion as its low casting cost means you can activate the Decoy's

ability and still cast the Will as early as turn five (or even turn four if you had an Orochi Sustainer or Sakura-Tribe Elder on turn two). The extra point of power granted by the Will means the Decoy is capable of taking down the majority of early plays and increasing the toughness to five means the Decoy can often attack into two creatures and still live to tell the tale. Serpent Skin and Uncontrollable Anger work too but Indomitable Will comes online a turn or two early and provides a nice power/toughness boost for its cost.

5 - Nagao, Bound by Honor and Konda's Hatamoto

Nagao is powerful enough that you don't need any other creatures alongside him really but if you're going to have one then Konda's Hatamoto is an excellent choice. It's a respectable turn two play anyway as it can hold off opposing 2/2s but it can't really do much else early on. It needs a Legendary Samurai partner and there are no better choices than a fourth turn Nagao. Konda's Hatamoto immediately becomes a nasty 2/4 Vigilant attacker with Bushido thrown in to make blocking difficult. When it attacks alongside Nagao you've got a 3/5 that becomes a 4/6 if blocked. Nagao by itself is obviously great, but your opponent will have the chance to attack you back and try to race it. With Konda's Hatamoto alongside him however, your opponent is in a bad position whether they try to block or attack and if both these guys go unanswered you will find the game ends in your favour very quickly. Nagao is an obvious early pick in a draft but if you get one keep your eyes open for Konda's Hatamoto coming round to you as it's an excellent companion to Nagao.

6 - Hankyu and Harsh Deceiver

This particular combination came up in a draft I recently took part in. I'd boarded in the Hanku against a black-blue deck that had Nezumi Cutthroats and various one toughness flyers and it wasn't until I played my Harsh Deceiver that I realised how nicely these two cards go together. Hankyu is borderline playable really but if you have a couple of Harsh Deceivers you can speed up its counter accumulation considerably. Just wait until you have a land on top of your library, and then tap the Deceiver to add a counter, untap it again in your turn, tap it to add a second counter, untap it in your opponent's turn and tap it for a third time during their end step. Getting three counters a turn instead of one improves the Hankyu a lot and this is a nice trick to pull off.

5 - Kashi-Tribe Reaver and Lure

No limited combo article would be complete without the obligatory Lure reference and this one is no exception. There are lots of creatures Lure is good on but Kashi-Tribe Reaver is one of the best for a few reasons. The first is simply that it has three power which means it's capable of taking down most blockers and can even snag two guys if you run it into a 2/1 and a 2/2 or something similar. The main benefit of this guy is that he regenerates for a fairly low cost and that allows you to attack into your opponent's board time after time without worrying too much about losing him in the process. His casting cost often means you can cast him on turn four, and then cast Lure and still afford to regenerate him on your fifth turn. The icing on the cake is his ability to tap down any annoying blockers that he doesn't kill. Sometimes your opponent might have a board of several high toughness creatures and this guy can deal one damage to each of them tapping them down for a turn and allowing your other creatures through for some damage at last.



4 - Soilshaper + Kami of the Hunt

Here we have two cards that don't really interact with each but when combined greatly enhance many other cards in your deck. Leading off with a second turn Soilshaper and third turn Kami of the Hunt is one of my favourite starts in this format as you're able to use both abilities to quickly deal a lot of damage. Typically the next turn will feature a Brutal Deceiver or other two or three casting cost Spirit followed by an attack for six with a land and the Kami. Turn five hopefully involves a Glacial Ray or Rend Spirit to take out a blocker and you've got another attack for six to eight damage right there. Your opponent is sitting on single digits and anytime you cast a Spirit or Arcane card an excess land becomes an additional attacker they have to deal with. This one-two-punch start can be pretty painful if you're on the receiving end of it. Just make sure you draft plenty of Spirits and Arcane spells to back these guys up.

3 - Initiate of Blood, Frostwielder and Honden of Infinite Rage

This isn't really one particular combo so much as three nearly identical effects that all get a lot better when used in concert with each other. All three of these cards are definitely playable although the Initiate is clearly the weakest of the bunch by itself as it can't target players and requires that a creature has already have been dealt damage before it can be targeted. However if you can get a Frostwielder or Honden alongside the Initiate then it's very likely you'll be able to find some poor two-toughness creature to gun down and once you've done that nothing will be safe. A Frostwielder by itself can be nasty but having two of them or having a Honden alongside allows you to take down the vast majority of the common creatures in this set. If you should pick up any of these three cards early in the draft you should definitely be placing a higher priority on picking up additional copies of all of them.



2 - Devouring Greed and Zuberass / Honden of Life's Web

I mentioned the first card in this particular combo earlier in the article and it has the potential to be very powerful in the right circumstances. It's a fine finisher, often capable of stealing 6-10 life points later on in a game but sometimes it can be difficult to find enough Spirits to make it worth running. The Zuberass are excellent choices to start with as they'll usually generate a worthwhile effect when they die and they're easy to pick up in multiples. The problem with them can sometimes be getting more than one of them into your graveyard at one time and the Greed helps out a lot there. I had one blue-black deck that ran two each of Ashen-Skin Zuberass and Floating-Dream Zuberass and Devouring Greed was excellent alongside those. People often correctly avoid attacking their early 2/1 guys into the Zuberass so they can stick around for a few turns. On more a couple of occasions I was able to sacrifice three Zuberass's to a Greed and drawing six cards, stealing eight life from an opponent and forcing them to discard three times is about as big a game swing as you can hope for.

The other card which works exceptionally well with Devouring Greed is Honden of Life's Web. Devouring Greed doesn't care that the sacrificed Spirits were only tokens and if you have a couple of other Spirits in play it doesn't take too long for the Honden to generate enough Spirits for a lethal Devouring Greed. Be very wary of any green-black deck that cranks out the Spirit tokens and doesn't use them in combat.

1 - Soratami Mirror-Guard and Wicked Akuba

I think I mentioned this particular duo in passing in a recent column but this is an excellent combo that I've been looking out for a lot in my recent drafts. I do like the blue-black archetype in this block as black has numerous aggressive early drops, which are quickly followed up by blue's powerful flyers. Combine this with some removal and a bounce spell perhaps and you've got a deck that can

over-power an opponent before they even really get their game started. Despite this you do sometimes get to a point where your opponent has stalled things with their Kabuto Moths, Kitsune Blademasters and Mothrider Samurais and you can't really deal them any more damage. This is where the Mirror-Guard comes in. Its ability is very cheap, requiring only two mana and a single land returned to your hand, and what better creature to send in than the Akuba! It only takes a couple of attacks to bring an opponent down from ten life with the Akuba's damage combined with the life-draining ability, and you're even helped out by the Mirror-Guard as you can use its ability to generate an extra point of black mana. You simply attack with the Akuba, and before blockers are declared you tap a Swamp for mana and then return it using the Mirror-Guards ability to make the Akuba unblockable. After damage has been dealt you can use the black mana to steal a life point from your opponent before the end of combat and then when you're back in your main phase you can replay the same Swamp and drain them again. Both these cards are high picks in their own right but if you get them together in play unanswered then the game ends very, very quickly.



Next Week

I'm going to be running through a new sealed deck build next week so be sure to check out the *Champions* Sealed Deck Primer from a few weeks back if you're feeling rusty. This one is from a PTQ I played in recently so here's the card pool I had to build from:

White:

Candles' Glow
 Devoted Retainer x 2
 Harsh Deceiver
 Horizon Seed
 Innocence Kami
 Kabuto Moth
 Kami of Ancient Law
 Kami of the Painted Road
 Kitsune Diviner
 Kitsune Riftwalker
 Mothrider Samurai
 Pious Kitsune
 Quiet Purity
 Reverse the Sands
 Sensei Golden-Tail
 Terashi's Cry
 Vigilance

Red:

Akki Avalanchers
 Akki Underminer
 Blind With Anger
 Brutal Deceiver
 Desperate Ritual x 2
 Frostwielder x 2
 Glacial Ray
 Pain Kami
 Sideswipe

Blue:

Callous Deceiver
 Eye of Nowhere
 Hisoka's Defiance
 Jushi Apprentice
 Lifted by Clouds
 Mystic Restraints
 Peer Through Depths
 Reach Through Mists
 Soratami Mirror-Guard
 Swirl the Mists
 Teller of Tales
 Wandering Ones

Green:

Burr Grafter
 Commune with Nature
 Feral Deceiver
 Gale Force
 Joyous Respite
 Kami of the Hunt
 Kodama's Reach
 Orbweaver Kumo
 Sakura-Tribe Elder

Black:

Bloodthirsty Ogre
 Cursed Ronin
 Distress
 Gibbering Kami x 2
 Gutwrencher Oni
 Kami of the Waning Moon
 Midnight Covenant
 Night of Soul's Betrayal
 Painwracker Oni
 Ragged Veins
 Rend Flesh
 Soulless Revival

Artifact and Land:

Cloudcrest Lake
 Waterveil Cavern
 Nine-Ringed Bo
 Reito Lantern

Sokenzan Bruiser

Venerable Kumo

Stone Rain

Wear Away

Unearthly Blizzard

Unnatural Speed

Yamabushi's Storm x 2

So that's the card-pool I had to work with. This time around I'm going to give you the deck I actually built. I built a black-white deck splashing red for the removal cards. There was a nice Arcane focus with several splice cards.

The question is: did I build it correctly? Did I even play the right colours? What would you have done differently when building this deck?

My Deck:

Champions of Kamigawa Sealed Deck 

Main Deck
40 cards

<p>4 Mountain</p> <p>7 Plains</p> <p>7 Swamp</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>18 lands</p>	<p>1 Bloodthirsty Ogre</p> <p>1 Cursed Ronin</p> <p>2 Gibbering Kami</p> <p>1 Gutwrencher Oni</p> <p>1 Harsh Deceiver</p> <p>1 Innocence Kami</p> <p>1 Kabuto Moth</p> <p>1 Kami of Ancient Law</p> <p>1 Kami of the Painted Road</p> <p>1 Kitsune Diviner</p> <p>1 Kitsune Riftwalker</p> <p>1 Mothrider Samurai</p> <p>1 Pain Kami</p> <p>1 Painwracker Oni</p> <p>1 Sensei Golden-Tail</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>16 creatures</p>	<p>1 Blind with Anger</p> <p>1 Candles' Glow</p> <p>1 Distress</p> <p>1 Glacial Ray</p> <p>1 Rend Flesh</p> <p>1 Soulless Revival</p> <hr style="width: 50%; margin-left: 0;"/> <p>6 other spells</p>
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I'll be giving you the answers to the above questions along with an analysis of this card pool next week so be sure to check in then. Until then, good luck PTQing!

