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Before we get into the sealed deck card pool from last week, I'm going to clarify a couple of things from last week's article that I received e-mails about. The first was the Frostwielder + Initiate of Blood + Honden of Infinite Rage combo. Unfortunately, I worded the paragraph badly; I'm aware that using a Frostwielder and an Initiate of Blood on a two-toughness creature won't cause the Initiate to flip - Frostwielder removes from the game and thus the Initiate never triggers - but the main point was that you get to kill all your opponent's two-toughness creatures -- which in this weenie-filled set is the vast majority of them! Even without flipping the Initiate (which you can still do via the Honden of Infinite Rage), these two cards together will devastate the creature base of most opponents.

The second issue came from combining the Zuberass with Devouring Greed. The typical e-mail I received was:

"On more a couple of occasions I was able to sacrifice three Zuberass to a Greed and drawing six cards, stealing eight life from an opponent and forcing them to discard three times."

If only three Zuberass are put into the graveyard, why do you get to draw six cards?"

Quite simply in the above example there were two Floating-Dream Zuberass and one Ashen-Skin Zuberass in play. When they all die at the same time they all trigger off each other, and the Floating-Dream Zuberass allow you to draw three cards each for a total of six, while the Ashen-Skin Zuberass forces an opponent to discard three times as well.



After last week's excursion into world of limited combos we're back on track this week with some more sealed deck analysis. Last week I gave you a card-pool that I had the "joy" (and I do use that word loosely) of opening at a recent English PTQ, along with the deck I built. Hopefully you've all had a chance to think about how you would have built the deck and whether it was any different from my build. This is a tricky pool of cards to work with as it's less than spectacular but I do believe there's a reasonable deck lurking within.

Before looking at it please consider checking out the *Champions* sealed deck primer article from a few weeks back if you feel you need a short refresher on the things to consider when deciding what deck to build from this card-pool.

The pool of cards I had to work with was this:

White:

Candles' Glow
Devoted Retainer x 2
Harsh Deceiver

Blue:

Callous Deceiver
Eye of Nowhere
Hisoka's Defiance

Black:

Bloodthirsty Ogre
Cursed Ronin
Distress

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

Jushi Apprentice
Lifted by Clouds
Mystic Restraints
Peer Through Depths
Reach Through Mists
Soratami Mirror-Guard
Swirl the Mists
Teller of Tales
Wandering Ones

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

Red:

Akki Avalanchers
Akki Underminer
Blind With Anger
Brutal Deceiver
Desperate Ritual x 2
Frostwielder x 2
Glacial Ray
Pain Kami
Sideswipe
Sokenzan Bruiser
Stone Rain
Unearthly Blizzard
Unnatural Speed
Yamabushi's Storm x 2

Green:

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

Artifact and Land:

Cloudcrest Lake
Waterveil Cavern
Nine-Ringed Bo
Reito Lantern

The deck I managed to come up with was:

Sealed Deck - First pass



Main Deck

40 cards

4 Mountain	1 Bloodthirsty Ogre	1 Blind with Anger
7 Plains	1 Cursed Ronin	1 Candles' Glow
7 Swamp	2 Gibbering Kami	1 Distress
18 lands	1 Gutwrencher Oni	1 Glacial Ray
	1 Harsh Deceiver	1 Rend Flesh
	1 Innocence Kami	1 Soulless Revival
	1 Kabuto Moth	6 other spells
	1 Kami of Ancient Law	
	1 Kami of the Painted Road	
	1 Kitsune Diviner	
	1 Kitsune Riftwalker	
	1 Mothrider Samurai	
	1 Pain Kami	

1 Painwracker Oni
1 Sensei Golden-Tail

16 creatures

This looked like a decent way to go at the time. There's a fair amount of evasion in there, you've got a few Soulshift guys too. The removal isn't great but it's ok and there are a lot of Splice onto Arcane effects too which is very nice when five out of the six spells are Arcane.

Before I get into the whys and wherefores about whether or not this deck was the right one to build I'm going to run through the colors in turn and give my opinion on each. This way you can see the sort of things you need to think about when examining a card pool for the first time.

White

There's a fair amount of depth in white although it's lacking some of the best commons with no copies of either Kitsune Blademaster or Cage of Hands. Innocence Kami, Kabuto Moth, and Mothrider Samurai are all solid and there are a couple of decent two-drops as well. Sensei Golden-Tail is fine, but not great due to the fact that his ability can only be played as a Sorcery. He's fine as a two mana 2/1 with Bushido but when you play with him you realise that his ability doesn't come into play very often; as such his main value is simply as a decent two-drop. Candles' Glow is a reasonable trick on par with Indomitable Will and you have the added bonus of the Splice mechanic which is useful in this pool. There's a lot of filler here in the Retainers, the Deceiver and so on but that's ok because at least it gives you some options.



Blue

So close, and yet so far. Blue suffers the familiar curse of just not having enough playable cards really. Mystic Restraint, Teller of Tales and Soratami Mirror-Guard are the obvious highlights but beyond that it goes downhill very quickly indeed. It would make a nice splash color if its best two cards didn't both require double-blue. There are some acceptable Arcane cards that could be considered but you don't really want to be playing Peer Through Depths and Eye of Nowhere in an effort to rustle up enough playables. It might be worth considering but my initial instincts would be to count blue out at this point.

Black

This is a little bit more like it. The Gibbering Kamis are fine flyers in this format as their Soulshift ability often triggers should they die. Gutwrencher Oni is definitely the superior of the two Onis but you even have the good Ogre to make Painwracker Oni playable as well. Although it has a significant drawback Painwracker Oni can end games very quickly. If you can find a way to get around that drawback you've got an exceptional creature on your hands; compare its stats to Duskwalker from *Invasion* and Gluttonous Zombie from *Onslaught* for example.

Night of Soul's Betrayal is a card to pay attention to sometimes, especially if you get a card pool that is resilient to its effect. Giving everything -1/-1 when it doesn't kill any of your creatures is a very

powerful effect and can shut down plenty of your opponents guys. Rend Flesh and Soulless Revival make up the numbers here and they're both fine cards to have. They both offer nice interactions with the rest of the cards in this pool with their Arcane/Splice additions.

Overall Black looks like it could make up a major color in the deck although there are some slightly heavy mana commitments required to run it.

Red

There's a bit of a mixture in the red cards with some excellent cards like Glacial Ray and Blind with Anger that add further to the Arcane/Splice theme of this card pool, but there's a lot of filler here too. Having two Frostwielders is very nice but they'll require a good number of mountains to support their casting cost. Pain Kami is a great creature to have and would interact well with the two Gibbering Kamis if they were played together. The Sideswipe is a good card to have access to but it should start off in the sideboard initially as it's only useful in a small number of circumstances. Cards like Sokenzan Bruiser and Yamabushi's Storm are on the edge of playable but would probably be included here. The Storm's can function as very limited removal in their own right as they can take out a Nezumi Cutthroat or Soratami Mirror-Guard cheaply. In this pool the Storms would hopefully also allow your Frostwielders to take down something a little bigger than they would otherwise be able to.

Green

Two of the best green commons are present here in Kodama's Reach and Sakura-Tribe Elder. Together they present an opportunity for a solid mana-base should the green cards get played. Looking at the rest of the green cards though, there aren't too many ways to actually win the game. A creature base of Burr Grafter, Kami of the Hunt, Venerable Kumo and Orbweaver Kumo isn't going to get very far and that leaves just the Feral Deceiver to carry the team. There are no combat tricks and nothing here that's particularly exciting. Despite the two mana-fixers I'd rate green as the worst color in this pool of cards.

Artifacts and Lands

Only a few cards to comment on here. The two lands would definitely be playable in a white-blue-black deck and they even make me lean a little more in that direction as they help smooth out the mana-base for that particular combination considerably.

Nine-Ringed Bo is not a card I'd usually consider playable but its effect is worth including if the Frostwielders are used as cumulatively those cards become a lot more potent. All of the Soulshift creatures are obviously Spirits and the Bo's ability to remove Spirits from the game when they die can be useful for preventing any abuse of that mechanic.

Choosing the colors



Despite the fact that the lands allow blue to fit very easily into this deck, there just aren't enough playable cards to warrant its inclusion. Mystic Restraint and Teller of Tales are excellent but their casting costs mean they could not be splashed and there isn't enough back-up to make blue a major color. With green being the weakest color here, that leaves only white, black and red to build the deck from. It's always best to start by looking at the possible two-color decks that could be built. It's worth taking the cards from each color and separating them first by type so you can see how many creatures you have, and then by casting cost so you can see what your mana curve is like. Doing that with this card pool gives the following choices:

White-black (22):

Kitsune Diviner
 Devoted Retainer x 2
 Sensei Golden-Tail
 Kami of Ancient Law
 Bloodthirsty Ogre
 Kami of the Waning Moon
 Kitsune Riftwalker
 Kabuto Moth
 Mothrider Samurai
 Cursed Ronin
 Gibbering Kami x 2
 Harsh Deceiver
 Innocence Kami
 Kami of the Painted Road
 Gutwrencher Oni
 Painwracker Oni
 Candles' Glow
 Soulless Revival
 Distress
 Rend Flesh

White-red (22):

Kitsune Diviner
 Akki Avalanchers
 Devoted Retainer x 2
 Sensei Golden-Tail
 Kami of Ancient Law
 Brutal Deceiver
 Pain Kami
 Kitsune Riftwalker
 Kabuto Moth
 Frostwielder x 2
 Mothrider Samurai
 Harsh Deceiver
 Sokenzan Bruiser
 Innocence Kami
 Kami of the Painted Road
 Candles' Glow
 Glacial Ray
 Yamabushi's Storm x 2
 Blind with Anger

Black-red (20):

Akki Avalanchers
 Brutal Deceiver
 Bloodthirsty Ogre
 Kami of the Waning Moon
 Pain Kami
 Cursed Ronin
 Gibbering Kami x 2
 Frostwielder x 2
 Sokenzan Bruiser
 Gutwrencher Oni
 Painwracker Oni
 Glacial Ray
 Soulless Revival
 Yamabushi's Storm x 2
 Distress
 Rend Flesh
 Blind with Anger

None of these are particularly exciting as they all use cards that are borderline playable. The black-red deck is especially weak as it can only muster up twenty cards for the deck leaving it three cards short and nowhere to get them from. The black-red deck also loses all the two-drops that are present in white and should be abandoned immediately. The other two combinations have acceptable mana curves and creature counts but there just isn't enough power in either of them to make you want to play them.

At this point it becomes clear that splashing a third color is going to be necessary in order to maintain the overall card quality. When I was constructing the deck at the PTQ it seemed obvious to me that red makes the best splash color as three of its best cards - Pain Kami, Glacial Ray, and Blind with Anger - all function as removal and all require only a single mana to use. The two Onis looked tempting and they needed a heavy black commitment and so I settled on a white-black deck with a red splash. Once you do that there are just a few card decisions to make to arrive at the deck-list I gave you earlier in this article.

In retrospect I don't think this was correct. Gutwrencher Oni can quickly become a liability, especially in sealed deck where many of the best decks are packed full of removal spells. Bloodthirsty Ogre, Kami of the Waning Moon and Cursed Ronin are fairly weak by themselves, the Ronin especially so in a three color deck. That leaves only Painwracker Oni as a good non-splashable card. All of the other cards in black could be splashed just as easily.

I also believe I underestimated the usefulness of the Frostwielders in this pool as they can function as additional removal against annoying creatures like Soratami Rainshaper and Nezumi Cutthroat, letting

your more powerful removal spells deal with bigger threats. At the PTQ in question I boarded in the extra red cards in almost every round as many of my opponent's were playing multiple one-toughness creatures.

Unfortunately, the deck I built was not good enough for top 8, and after finishing playing I asked the opinion of many of the UK's best Magic players such as Sam Gomersall and John Ormerod. Everyone agreed it was a tricky build, but after looking at a lot of different decks the general consensus was for a white-red deck, splashing for black.

There are some cards that will obviously go in the deck so I'll list those first:

White-red-black deck:

- Kitsune Diviner
- Sensei Golden-Tail
- Kami of Ancient Law
- Brutal Deceiver
- Pain Kami
- Kabuto Moth
- Frostwielder x 2
- Harsh Deceiver
- Mothrider Samurai
- Innocence Kami
- Kami of the Painted Road
- Soulless Revival
- Candles' Glow
- Glacial Ray
- Rend Flesh
- Blind With Anger



That's the obvious seventeen cards. There are still six slots to fill though and there are numerous decisions to make when deciding which cards should fill those holes.

Selecting the final cards

The two Gibbering Kamis would certainly nice additions, as there are several Spirits that they can return. However, including them puts significant pressure on the mana-base of the deck as you really want to run only seventeen lands and you would need four of these to be Swamps to be able to support the four black spells. A lot of the early creatures are white and the Frostwielders require double red so it's very difficult to fit that additional Swamp in. A land count of seven Plains, seven Mountains and three Swamps is ideal and I think the black creatures have to be left out to maintain this.

Nine-Ringed Bo takes one of the available slots as it combines well with the two Frostwielders as well as being able to take out Cruel Deceivers and Hearth Kamis by itself. Sokenzan Bruiser just about makes it in. Although it's unimpressive as a 3/3 for five mana, a lot of people end up splashing red for cards like Glacial Ray and Yamabushi's Flame and as a result his Mountainwalk will often come into play.

So that leaves four slots left. It's a very difficult call here, and I think you basically chose any four of:

- Devoted Retainer x 2
- Kitsune Riftwalker
- Gibbering Kami x 2

- Yamabushi's Storm x 2

Although I don't like including the Kamis due to the ramifications their inclusion has on the mana-base, I think that they add a lot of power to the deck. Including the Kamis would require swapping a Plains for a Swamp most likely. The Kitsune Riftwalker isn't a favourite of mine as it has fairly poor stats and a difficult casting cost. Protection from Arcane is basically worthless on this card but it can be useful if its Protection from Spirits ability comes into play. The Riftwalker would make the cut for me.

The two Devoted Retainers would go in the deck if you wanted to speed it up a little. They're not great but they give you something to do early on and they typically trade for a 2/2 or assist in a gang-block later in the game. I think I'd be tempted to include one of these just to have an extra play in the first few turns of the game.

The Yamabushi's Storms are mediocre by themselves but they do have back-up in the shape of the two Frostwielders and the Nine-Ringed Bo in this deck. Adding these is fine, and I think they would be the final cards to make the cut for me personally.

Overall, I think the following is deck that I should have built from this pool:



Sealed Deck - Second pass



Main Deck

40 cards

7 Mountain	1 Brutal Deceiver	1 Blind with Anger
7 Plains	1 Devoted Retainer	1 Candles' Glow
3 Swamp	2 Frostwielder	1 Glacial Ray
17 lands	1 Harsh Deceiver	1 Nine-Ringed Bo
	1 Innocence Kami	1 Rend Flesh
	1 Kabuto Moth	1 Soulless Revival
	1 Kami of Ancient Law	2 Yamabushi's Storm
	1 Kami of the Painted Road	8 other spells
	1 Kitsune Diviner	
	1 Kitsune Riftwalker	
	1 Mothrider Samurai	
	1 Pain Kami	
	1 Sensei Golden-Tail	
	1 Sokenzan Bruiser	
	15 creatures	

All of the last four slots I discussed are fairly interchangeable and I would certainly imagine sideboarding into the Gibbering Kami build if I were facing a removal heavy deck where the Soulshift

effect might come into play, or if I needed something to block opposing flyers. The Quiet Purity and Sideswipe are good cards to have in the sidebar. One of the nicest things to do in this format is to Sideswipe an opponent's Waking Nightmare and there are plenty of other targets for it too.

I think this build is better than the original one because it includes more answers to many of the common creatures you'll see in sealed deck. The Frostwielders are excellent in the slower sealed format and they add more to the deck than the two Onis did in the heavy black version. The more powerful spells - Glacial Ray and Blind with Anger - are also easier to cast here as red is now a major color of the deck instead of just a splash.

That's it for this week; I hope this build has given you something things to think about, as it was one of the tougher ones.

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