

# Wrapping up *Betrayers*

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Last week I tackled the overview of the white, blue and black cards and today I'll be dealing with the rest. As I said last week, I don't believe it's possible to give out strict pick orders within colours simply because a lot of the time your optimum choice will be decided as much by mana curve, card type, and the needs of your deck as by the actual quality of the cards in question. This is even truer when you get to the third pack of the draft, which is when you'll be seeing your first *Betrayers* cards of the draft for the next four months.

So, continuing our trek around the colour wheel, we move from black onwards into red.

## Red

At the top of the red pile is clearly *Torrent of Stone*, which is miles ahead of any of the other red commons. I can't really envision any situation where you might take another red common over it. As I've said previously, I wouldn't go around expecting to splice this often but for a four mana Instant Arcane card this is quality removal even before the possibility of splicing it is considered.

*Frostling* is probably the best of the remaining commons as it can trade with 2/2s, can shoot down X/1s and functions as a cheap Spiritcraft trigger and adds a fine Soulshift target into the bargain too. A lot of games it'll get in for a point or two of damage and then trade with something more expensive than itself, which is about all you can really ask of a common one-drop.

*Goblin Cohort* has been very good for me so far and will be better than *Frostling* in decks without Soulshift a lot of the time. It's a great first-turn play in the right deck and is comparable to *Isamaru*, *Hound of Konda* with the right draw.

You'll need to make sure you're running enough creatures when you do play him though as he's obviously a lot better in 17-creature decks than in 13-creature decks. You'll also want to have a decent number of other one or two casting cost guys so the Cohort is able to attack in the first few turns of the game. Casting it turn one and then not following it up until turn four rather defeats the purpose of it.

*Frost Ogre* is a decent body that red decks have been lacking in *Champions*. There really isn't very much you can say about him but five mana for five power is an acceptable deal and he hits very hard if your opponent is unable to block him.

*Blademane Baku* if my last choice for the top five as I've had much better experiences with it than I have with *Shinka Gatekeeper*. The Baku is a fine two-drop as long as you can get a counter or two on it and that shouldn't be too problematic in most games. I've often had this hit an opponent for five or seven damage or had it take down an annoying blocker like a *River Kaijin* or *Harsh Deceiver* which very few other two-drops can do. *Shinka Gatekeeper* on the other hand hasn't been particularly great for me. He's fine when he's unblocked but he's lacking that extra point of toughness that makes



*Easily the best of Red's commons*


Gnarled Mass and Takenuma Bleeder so good and this format is just full of cheap 2/2 creatures that the Gatekeeper trades with. He can sometimes be a very risky attacker too. On one occasion I won an otherwise unwinnable game simply because my opponent alpha-striked me for the win with several creatures including a Gatekeeper. I blocked his Gatekeeper with two of my best guys, and dealt my opponent a lot of damage while keeping myself alive with a Candles' Glow. This additional damage meant I was able to attack back for the win on the following turn. You can try to play around such situations, but I've found the Gatekeeper's drawback to be significantly detrimental on too many occasions for me to be happy about playing it.



First Volley is an interesting little card to have seen print. It's functionally the same as an old card from *Urza's Saga*: Shower of Sparks. The only difference is that we'll have to pay an extra colourless mana for the Arcane subtype on First Volley. Now Shower of Sparks wasn't really particularly playable in the *Urza's Saga* draft format, which would suggest that First Volley is even less playable due to the increase in its casting cost. Interestingly, I don't actually think that's the case here though. *Urza's Saga* wasn't a particularly fast format and a lot of the staple commons were big cheap creatures that came out early via the echo mechanic which meant Shower couldn't kill very much. *Kamigawa* is very different though. We have a lot of fast 2/1 two-drops and a few flyers that have one toughness as well. There are also a few potentially annoying 1/1s like Split-Tail Miko or Soilshaper that you'll be happy to take care of for two mana. Combine that with the fact that this is a cheap Arcane card which is useful for splicing things and for triggering spiritcraft effects and I think you'll find that this card turns out to be quite playable most of the time.

*Better than you might think...*

The last of the playable cards is Ire of Kaminari, but this one is only playable in certain decks. I think this card has a lot of potential in the right deck and may well lead to a modification of the Dampen Thought archetype which relies on getting all of the Ires that might otherwise be unplayable for other drafters. To demonstrate what I mean, here's an example draft deck that I recently had:

Kamigawa Draft		
		
<b>Main Deck</b>		
<i>40 cards</i>		
10 Island	1 Cunning Bandit	1 Consuming Vortex
7 Mountain	1 Frostwielder	1 Eerie Procession
17 lands	1 River Kaijin	2 Eye of Nowhere
	1 Soratami Rainshaper	1 First Volley
	1 Soratami Savant	1 Genju of the Falls
	2 Soul of Magma	1 Glacial Ray
	7 creatures	1 Hanabi Blast
		1 Honden of Infinite Rage
		2 Ire of Kaminari
		1 Mystic Restraints
		2 Sift Through Sands
		2 Torrent of Fire

Now this deck takes advantage of spiritcraft and splice as well as the nice combinations of Frostwilder/Honden/Soul of Magma. It obviously has a lot of good cards in it but both of the Ires came very late in the draft and were excellent additions to the deck. On one occasion an Ire took out a Moss Kami and on another it combined with Glacial Ray to straight up kill my opponent when they thought they were sitting safely on 11 life. Ire won't be playable in the vast majority of decks but it's definitely a card that shouldn't be dismissed completely as there will be decks like this one where it's a real powerhouse.

There are some nice playables in the uncommons too. Cunning Bandit is my favourite as its ability is very powerful and it also hits very hard when flipped. It's very rare that you'll lose a game when you've flipped the Bandit with two or more counters on it. Genju of the Spires has also been excellent for me so far. Sometimes it smashes for six or twelve damage but usually it just lets you sacrifice a Mountain for one of your opponent's blockers, which is plenty powerful enough.

Ogre Recluse has been quite good so far as most decks don't play that many Instants that they want to cast during your attack step to tap down the Ogre. As a result it usually functions as a four mana 5/4 that can't block and that's well ahead of the typical power/cost ratio. Be wary though, and board it out if you are playing against an Arcane/splice heavy blue deck.

## Green

The last colour to deal with is green. I've seen other commentators rate this colour highly in this set but after numerous drafts I personally haven't found that to be the case. Its best common is generally agreed to be Gnarled Mass and that's basically just a 3/3 for three mana. It's powerful no doubt, but it's only a vanilla creature at the end of the day and compared to the best commons in other colours like Waxmane Baku, Horobi's Whisper and Torrent of Stone it really isn't as good.

Roar of Jukai has been widely praised as a very powerful combat trick and sometimes it is. If you're attacking two of your guys into two of your opponent's then it's devastating. In reality though, that situation doesn't occur that often and I've found the card (for me) to be a lot worse than Kodama's Might on the majority of occasions. Several times I've had to cast this simply so I could use it to splice something or to trigger a spiritcraft effect because it was obvious that there wasn't going to be a time where I would be able to use it to gain an advantage in combat. You can't use it when blocking, and you can't use it to deal extra damage via an unblocked creatures, and both of those restrictions significantly weaken the card. It's still playable for sure, and likely in the top 4 green commons, but I think it's being over-rated by many players for now.



*The best green common, but is it enough?*

Child of Thorns is ok, Scaled Hulk is ok, Sakura-Tribe Springcaller is ok, but none of these cards have excited me at all. The Hulk is a lot worse than Moss Kami without the trample ability for example. The Springcaller is fine but it's another four-drop in a colour that's already heavy with them and there's no way I'd want to play this over Order of the Sacred Bell. Child of Thorns I quite like though. In the

same way that Frostling can be compared to Mogg Fanatic, Child of Thorns is very comparable to Mogg Raider (which more recently got reincarnated as Goblin Sledder). It's a very similar effect and is quite playable, especially with the Spirit creature type added on as well.

There's not too much depth in green though. Petalmane Baku, Uproot, Vital Surge, Matsu-Tribe Sniper, Traproot Kami and Harbinger of Spring are all weak main-deck cards although some of them have their uses after boarding. The Baku is comparable to one of the weaker Zuberas but it can be a necessary evil if you have a three colour deck and really need that mana fixing. Traproot Kami can be ok in the green mirror whilst the Sniper is a very good board card against blue decks obviously.

Even so, that's over half of the green commons there, and that's a very high number of weak cards compared to the other colours.

Things improve however once you look at the uncommons. Once again the powerful cycle of Genju and flip cards are continued here with two of the best in the set. Genju of the Cedars is excellent and Budoka Pupil tends to end games very quickly if you can flip him over with three or four counters on him. Forked-Branch Garami is another excellent uncommon. As a 4/4 for five mana it's very efficient, but the double soulshift can be really significant in some games. It's especially useful in green, which has a lot of four mana Spirits that allow you to make the most of the ability.

Unchecked Growth is a superb Giant Growth effect and it obviously shines brightest in a Spirit heavy deck where it can give the Trample ability too. Sosuke's Summons is a nice card in any deck with a few Snakes in it, but if you're playing a lot of Snakes it can be really powerful indeed. I've seen it generate eight 1/1s in one game and although it required a lot of mana that's a massive impact on the game for one little sorcery.

Finally you have Loam Dweller and Lifespinner. They're both fine creatures for their mana cost although you won't be using the abilities too often. Loam Dweller can accelerate you to five mana on turn four if you have the third turn Spirit and a fifth land in your hand but mostly it just functions as a nice 2/2 Spirit for two mana.

## Lands & Artifacts



Rounding out the set we only have uncommons and rares to worry about. Both the lands in the set are playable although in different circumstances. I wouldn't normally play Tendo Ice Bridge in a two colour deck but it's nice to have if you're running three colours. I've played Gods' Eye, Gate to the Reikai in a couple of decks but only because they were hyper-aggressive ones featuring Akki Avalanchers and Crack the Earth. In general, you won't be able to trigger its effect and it's obviously not worth playing if you can't.

Pretty much all of the uncommon Equipment in the set is playable. Ronin Warclub is the best of the bunch as its Equip cost is basically zero in the early game and in the late game you don't mind too much that it costs a lot to move it around as you often have mana to spare. Shuko is fine in a fast deck, and Blinding Powder is nice when you have a lot of creatures that have a high power but low toughness.

*Possibly the best artifact for Limited in years.*

The Shuriken is sometimes just good and other times completely ridiculous if you have the Ninjas to back it up. Even

when you don't it's still powerful due to various tricks you can pull by stacking its abilities appropriately. I'll go over those another time.

Of the rares, the card everyone wants to open is Umezawa's Jitte. I've been playing **Magic** a long time and I don't think we've seen an artifact as powerful as this one for several years. Due to the fact that it relies on any combat damage dealt it doesn't matter whether your opponent blocks the equipped creature or not, you'll get the counters on it regardless. Once you have the first two counters on it the card basically renders the game unwinnable as they can no longer kill opposing creatures in combat due to the threat of the +4/+4 it can grant and at the same time you can't race the life-gain or the repetitive death of all your men. So basically all you have to do when you see this card is kill every creature your opponent ever casts. If you can't do that "simple" thing then you'll probably be scooping up your cards in swift order and then searching your sideboard for a Wear Away or Terashi's Grasp.

## Next Week

That's it for this week but now that we've had a look at the set it's time to kick off a bit of practice with it! Let's start out with a simple *Betrayer's* first-pick choice. You find yourself in a standard *Champions-Champions-Betrayers* booster draft. Throughout the first *Champions* booster your picks were:

1. Eight-and-a-Half-Tails
2. Yamabushi's Flame
3. Kitsune Blademaster
4. Kami of Fire's Roar
5. Blessed Breath
6. Mothrider Samurai
7. Soratami Rainshaper
8. Kitsune Diviner
9. River Kaijin
10. Kitsune Healer
11. Sideswipe
12. Eye of Nowhere
13. Joyous Respite
14. Hisoka's Guard
15. Mana Seism

Pack two gave you the following picks:

1. Glacial Ray
2. Samurai of the Pale Curtain
3. Cage of Hands
4. Soratami Mirror-Guard
5. Reciprocate
6. Hearth Kami
7. Kami of Ancient Law
8. Indomitable Will
9. Callous Deceiver
10. Waking Nightmare
11. Call to Glory
12. Kashi-Tribe Warriors
13. Reito Lantern
14. Numai Outcast
15. Midnight Covenant

You finally open up your *Betrayers* pack and find the following to choose between:





Which card do you draft?

**Which card do you draft?**

- Goryo's Vengeance
- Genju of the Cedars
- Soratami Mindsweeper
- Cunning Bandit
- Horobi's Whisper
- Split-Tail Miko
- Harbinger of Spring
- Mistblade Shinobi
- Psychic Spear
- Roar of Jukai
- Frost Ogre
- Waxmane Baku
- Akki Blizzard-Herder
- Minamo's Meddling
- Heart of Light

Submit

Join me next week when I'll be examining the possible choices.

