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Borrowing your opponent's creatures is just the beginning.

### Cunning Bandit (and Azamuki, Treachery Incarnate)


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hen I first heard of the flip cards, in a lot of ways I thought it would be a bad idea. I was sure that the cards would look terrible. I was sure that they would make the cards too powerful or too weak, and I was sure that the way that the cards “flipped” would be uninteresting and perhaps arbitrary. After checking out the cards at the *Champions* Prerelease, I was proven wrong. When each of the flip cards proved themselves and turned over to become “heroes”, there just seemed to be something quite appropriate about it all. The cards seemed to be just right, much in the way that [Form of the Dragon](#) seemed to live and breath.

With the five new flip cards, we were introduced to what have been called “the Betrayers”, the humans who moved into the world of the Spirit. There was a solid 2/2 for three mana in every color and it could easily be argued that they were even more powerful than any of the heroes from *Champions*. In arguments between my friends (or debates, if you prefer) we went back and forth between which card was the best of them, but in the end most of us couldn't convince anyone else and we each settled on our own favorites. Whichever is the best, if any of the cards deserves the handle “Betrayer”, though, that card is the [Cunning Bandit](#). After all, when the [Cunning Bandit](#) becomes Azamuki, Treachery Incarnate you do get to steal away the loyalty of creatures that belong to your opponent.



## All on its own

When we were [first introduced to the Cunning Bandit](#), I read the card and thought it was a lot more powerful than it actually is. I'm guessing I'm not the only one that misread the Bandit and thought that once it became Azamuki, Treachery Incarnate, the card actually used ki counters to cast mini-[Threaten](#)s. I had visions in my head of ridiculous turns: opponents never able to attack as long as you had a ki counter unless they were down to one creature (and even then, only being able to attack if you let them); turns spent with them losing every possible defending creature and having them swing in for a huge kill.

But Azamuki, as good as he is, isn't that good.

When you steal a creature with Azamuki, it doesn't get haste. When you steal a creature, it doesn't untap. So, without a little bit of help, what you'll be using Azamuki for is to get a blocker out of the way or to steal a creature before their attack to maybe make them think twice about it. That's *still* pretty good. Think about what would happen to your play if you were faced with either of these possibilities – generally, every time you attack you'd be likely to attack with every creature you controlled, or you wouldn't attack with any creature. Azamuki doesn't even have to use a ki counter to get the opponent to play this way. If you know that your opponent is going to be encouraged to send with everything, that [Hold the Line](#) is going to completely destroy them.

As a 5/2 (presumably with friends joining in), Azamuki can be a formidable attacker. Only the most aggressive of decks are really going to want to go into a pure race situation with this guy by simply attacking with all of their creatures every turn. Sure, he's only got a 2 toughness, flipped or no, but that doesn't mean he can't be a big threat.

## Making it Threatening

Of course, the [Cunning Bandit](#) doesn't exist in a vacuum. Lucky us, we get to choose what cards we want to play in our decks! I've talked to enough players who misread the card the same way I did when I first saw it, so what



*A repeating Threaten? Not quite.  
At least, not on its own...*

are the big things that we're missing to get the card to do what we thought it did? The first is haste. The second is untapping the creature. Those are pretty easy tricks to pull off.

The first significant haste card that I can remember is [Concordant Crossroads](#). Now [Concordant Crossroads](#) has only a wee bit of goodness going for it: it's cheap. But the problem is it's a bit hard to find and it does affect both players (even the updated easy to find version hits both players!). At first you'd think that [In the Web of War](#) would solve your problems, but unfortunately it doesn't. [In the Web of War](#) does give haste to creatures that come into play on your side of the table, but stealing a creature doesn't suddenly make it come into play, it just brings it to your team. What you're looking for is a card like [Fires of Yavimaya](#). In a pinch you can sack it to give any of your creature +2/+2 (especially good if you need to protect your 5/2), and it keeps giving the gift of haste to everything you might play or steal. For the extremely budget conscious, you probably could find a [Battle Rampart](#), or for a temporary haste fix, [Unnatural Speed](#). Hey, at least it is an Arcane spell!

On the other end of things is the untapping. Where the haste lets you be aggressive versus an opponent that refuses to attack, untapping lets you really wreck people's plans to attack. In conjunction with Haste, it really becomes ugly, turning any tapped creature your opponent might have hoped to keep from the fray into a potential attacker.

When it comes to untapping, there are simple cards like [Twiddle](#), of course. [Teardrop Kami](#) can be your personal walking [Twiddle](#), or [Turnabout](#) can really pull a mean trick. With enough mana, a [Staff of Domination](#) could be used to untap a whole slew of creatures, but it really doesn't take all that much to simply get the one or two creatures you might steal. For cheaper, reusable untapping, [Seeker of Skybreak](#) and [Aphetto Alchemist](#) can do the trick here.

## Sacrifice



Getting your opponent's creature is great, even if you don't attack or block with it. I'm sure that there is *something* somewhat diabolical that you can do with their creature in the short time it is yours. Cards like [Braids](#), [Cabal Minion](#) and [Smokestack](#) are great places to begin, but imagine what happens if you have a [Greater Harvester](#) around! Take one of their few creatures to feed to it and swing in to either force them to chump block with another one, or if they can't, really ruin their day. Other good reusable sources include [Blood Rites](#), [Food Chain](#), and [Phyrexian Plaguelord](#). If you're lucky enough to have some haste, the incredibly icky feeling your opponent will have after you steal their creature, attack with it and then sack it to a [Food Chain](#) to get out a new creature should have you smiling for the rest of your night.


## Keeping Treachery Incarnate Alive

Whether he's a Bandit or a Spirit, a 2 toughness guy is hard to keep alive. There are a few options, though. Red isn't so good at helping to keep a [Cunning Bandit](#) alive, leaving you only the option of a few creature enchantments (like [Giant Strength](#)), but nearly every other color is. We'll cover Black's major option of reanimation and Blue's of bounce, but there are others.

Blue can also use Countermagic of various sorts, of course. Blue is known as the color that most interacts with what an opponent's plan is, fiddling with it this way and that. Try out [Veil of Secrecy](#) (which can double as a great way to get a 5/2 in during an attack) or go old-school with [Reality Ripple](#). My favorite option in Blue, though, has to be [Kira, Great Glass-Spinner](#). Especially if this card is backed up by tricks, it can be nearly impossible to kill your Azamuki.

Green and White have similar options here. White can provide protection effects either by stopping damage with a card like [Shining Shoal](#) or by simply protecting its creatures with [Blessed Breath](#). Green will usually use a pumping effect like [Giant Growth](#) or [Kodama's Might](#). Either way, you can use a simple trick to make sure this cheap threat sticks around.

## On Ki

Ki is the thing that powers the [Cunning Bandit](#) and all of the other Betrayers. Each one of these cards gets ki  in the same way, by casting Arcane or Spirit cards, and they can flip at the end of any turn once you've got a mere two ki counters on the card. It isn't too hard to get ki counters if you are running Spirit and Arcane spells, but there is always the question of *when* to flip him. The longer you wait, the more powerful he will be as Azamuki, Treachery Incarnate, but you'll be missing out on his power in the meantime. If you don't wait to build him up, you can use up Azamuki's ki in a short time. It's not like you can reflip him into a [Cunning Bandit](#) again. What then?

Well, I'm sorry to say, he has to go away. You'll need to recast the [Cunning Bandit](#), and the two paths to do that are bounce and raising the dead. In a sense, there is a kind of irony here, as story-wise, the [Cunning Bandit](#) became Azamuki after his death, but that's neither here nor there.

A card like [Curfew](#) is great here, letting you slightly set back your opponent's development and bringing back the Azamuki to your hand that you wanted back anyway. Other cards that are reusable are great options. Don't forget [Crystal Shard](#) or an older card like [Tradewind Rider](#). [Consuming Vortex](#) shows up as another great choice simply because of the Arcane, given the kind of deck you're likely to run here.

In the reanimation department, [Stir the Grave](#) keeps you in the *Kamigawa* block, but it isn't nearly as cheap as a lot of other options, anything from [Raise Dead](#), [Animate Dead](#), or [Exhume](#). A flipped [Nezumi Graverobber](#) can easily bring back a Bandit. Personally, I like [Soulless Revival](#) a lot here. In a deck that will already be including Arcane, being able to splice is nice, plus it can help trigger your Bandit into an Azamuki in the process.

So, blue, of course, has the most ways to bounce. Black is generally the path you'd take to bring back the dead. What they both have is an amazing way to reset an Azamuki: Ninja. The Ninja are already packed with great potential, but with Azamuki, they are even more powerful. I've already talked about how Azamuki strongly encourages an attacking opponent to choose all of their creatures to attack with. What a perfect opportunity for a Ninja! Even if they choose not to attack, Azamuki is greatly suited to making sure there aren't any blockers available to stop your attackers. Go on in, and if you're in the mood, turn your Azamuki into a Ninja and then recast the [Cunning Bandit](#) for more fun later on.

## Wrapping Up

The [Cunning Bandit](#) (as Azamuki) can really do some pretty cool things to the way the game gets played. When you think about the effect all by itself, it doesn't do very much other than change the way your opponent has to play. That in and of itself makes the card interesting. Once you try to exploit the card, even more can come of it. This week, here is a Block Constructed deck with the [Cunning Bandit](#).

## Main Deck

60 cards

4 <a href="#">Lantern-Lit Graveyard</a>	2 <a href="#">Blood Rites</a>
13 <a href="#">Mountain</a>	4 <a href="#">Glacial Ray</a>
7 <a href="#">Swamp</a>	3 <a href="#">Rend Flesh</a>
	3 <a href="#">Soulless Revival</a>
24 lands	2 <a href="#">Yamabushi's Flame</a>

4 <a href="#">Cunning Bandit</a>	14 other spells
4 <a href="#">Frostling</a>	
4 <a href="#">Hearth Kami</a>	
2 <a href="#">Ink-Eyes, Servant of Oni</a>	
4 <a href="#">Thief of Hope</a>	
4 <a href="#">Throat Slitter</a>	

22 creatures



This deck can get out an aggressive start and use the cheap removal to take care of most of the smaller creatures. Other than a creature like [Kodama of the North Tree](#), the Azamuki can steal big creatures out of the way if need be and use a [Throat Slitter](#) to take care of the problem. There are no cards that make use of haste or untapping in this deck, but it does have the Ninjas to reset the Bandit, and [Blood Rites](#) to turn those creatures into damage. Throw in a couple copies of [Unnatural Speed](#) for fun if you want to attack with your opponent's critters.





I hope you enjoyed this week's column. See you next week!

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