

Power or Consistency?

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Scott Wills

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It's time once again for your weekly dose of Limited **Magic** and today I'll be discussing the draft pick that was covered at the end of last week's article. Hopefully you all took the time to fill in the poll last week to let me know what you thought the right pick would be. I'll be getting to the results shortly. So you don't have to flick back and forth between the two articles here again is the draft pick in question:

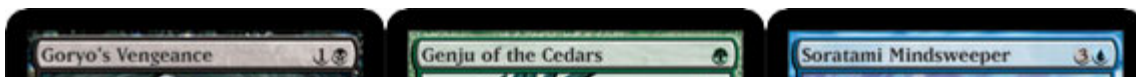
You find yourself in a standard *Champions-Champions-Betrayers* booster draft. Throughout the first *Champions* booster your picks were:

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:





Instant — Arcane

Return target legendary creature card from your graveyard to play. That creature gains haste. Remove it from the game at end of turn.

Splice onto Arcane **2** (As you play an Arcane spell, you may reveal this card from your hand and pay its splice cost. If you do, add this card's effects to that spell.)

—Hakari



Enchant Forest

2: Enchanted Forest becomes a 4/4 green Spirit creature until end of turn. It's still a land.

When enchanted Forest is put into a graveyard, you may return Genju of the Cedars from your graveyard to your hand.

—Arnie Swekel



Creature — Moonfolk Wizard

Flying

2, Return a land you control to its owner's hand: Target player puts the top two cards of his or her library into his or her graveyard.

—Alex Blarley-Orlandelli

1/4

Cunning Bandit

Whenever you play a Spirit or Arcane spell, you may put a ki counter on Cunning Bandit. At end of turn, if there are two or more ki counters on Cunning Bandit, you may flip it.

Creature — Human Warrior 2/2



5/2 **Legendary Creature — Spirit**

Remove a ki counter from Azamuki. Treachery Incarnate: Gain control of target creature until end of turn.

—Azamuki, Treachery Incarnate

—Pablo Fajardo

Horobi's Whisper

If you control a Swamp, destroy target nonblack creature.

Splice onto Arcane—Remove four cards in your graveyard from the game. (As you play an Arcane spell, you may reveal this card from your hand and pay its splice cost. If you do, add this card's effects to that spell.)



—Mekki Bricker

Split-Tail Miko

***,** **2**: Prevent the next 2 damage that would be dealt to target creature or player this turn.

"I wish there were no use for those with my talents. I wish that I could walk Kamigata forgotten and unneeded, with no war wounds to heal and no broken bones to mend."

—Kev Walker

1/1



Creature — Fox Cleric

Harbinger of Spring

Protection from non-Spirit creatures

Soulshift 4 (When this is put into a graveyard from play, you may return target Spirit card with converted mana cost 4 or less from your graveyard to your hand.)



2/1

—Cand Miller

Mistblade Shinobi

Ninjutsu **1** (**1**, Return an unblocked attacker you control to hand: Put this card into play from your hand tapped and attacking.)

Whenever Mistblade Shinobi deals combat damage to a player, you may return target creature that player controls to its owner's hand.



—Kev Walker

1/1

Psychic Spear

Target player reveals his or her hand. Choose a Spirit or Arcane card from it. That player discards that card.

"The wizards of Takenuma Swamp faced the horrors of humanity every day. It's no wonder they fared so well against the kami."

—Observations of the Kami War



—Kev Walker

Sorcery

Roar of Jukai

If you control a Forest, each blocked creature gets +2/+2 until end of turn.

Splice onto Arcane—An opponent gains 5 life. (As you play an Arcane spell, you may reveal this card from your hand and pay its splice cost. If you do, add this card's effects to that spell.)



—

Frost Ogre

Mountain ogres allowed blizzards to sheathe them in ice, both to reinforce their armor and to hide their pungent musk from potential prey.



—

Waxmane Baku

Whenever you play a Spirit or Arcane spell, you may put a ki counter on Waxmane Baku.

1, Remove X ki counters from Waxmane Baku: Tap X target creatures.



—



Which card do you draft?

The deck so far

When drafting you should obviously try and have an overall picture of what your deck looks like. There are many questions you should be asking yourself during each pick such as "What colours will this deck be?" and "How high/low is my mana curve?" There are also more abstract things like "How is this deck planning to win?" and "What cards am I looking to draft in the next few picks, or next pack?" that you need to bear in mind.

In most booster drafts you should have a minute or so to review your picks between each booster and that's the time when you can best answer those more abstract questions and give yourself an idea of what to look for from the next pack. Having a good knowledge of the commons in a given set is very important here as you can then note some specific cards in your mind that you should be trying to draft. Having a general idea of what to look out for is good too of course.

As an example, I'm going to provide my answers to some of those questions here just to demonstrate the things that you might think about.

In terms of colour, white is obviously going to be played. There are ten white cards that are definitely making the cut and one or two more that might. The second colour looks likely to be red but that isn't guaranteed yet. There are 3-4 playable red cards but also 3-5 playable blue cards and either of those colours could make up the second colour. It's possible that the two powerful red removal spells might be splashed if the deck ended up primarily blue-white.

There is another consideration that impacts that option though, and that is the casting costs of a couple of the spells. With both Eight-and-a-Half-Tails and Samurai of the Pale Curtain making the deck it'll really need ten or even eleven Plains to improve the chance of casting them on the second turn. That means it's very difficult to fit in enough lands for a splash colour although it might be possible to run two splashes with 3-4 Blue cards and four Islands, and 2-3 red cards along with three Mountains. Realistically though it's looking like either white-blue or white-red will be the choice.

The mana curve of the deck is excellent so far. The Blue white deck looks like this, with the cards that aren't definitely making the cut listed in brackets:

1 Mana: Kitsune Diviner, Blessed Breath, Reciprocate.

2 Mana: Eight-and-a-Half-Tails, Samurai of the Pale Curtain, Kami of Ancient Law,

Indomitable Will, (Eye of Nowhere), (Call To Glory).

3 Mana: Kitsune Blademaster, Soratami Rainshaper, River Kaijin, (Callous Deceiver), Cage of Hands.

4 Mana: Mothrider Samurai, Soratami Mirror-Guard, (Kitsune Healer).

The white-red deck is very similar:

1 Mana: Kitsune Diviner, Blessed Breath, Reciprocate.

2 Mana: Eight-and-a-Half-Tails, Samurai of the Pale Curtain, Kami of Ancient Law, Hearth Kami, Indomitable Will, Glacial Ray, (Call To Glory).

3 Mana: Kitsune Blademaster, Yamabushi's Flame, Cage of Hands.

4 Mana: Mothrider Samurai, (Kami of Fire's Roar), (Kitsune Healer).

There's lots to do in the first few turns of the game (as long as there are enough Plains to hit ** early on of course) and with a low curve like this seventeen lands should be sufficient, which is another mark against the option of splashing a third colour.

The next question to tackle is "How does this deck win?" I think the blue-white version will have an easier time than the red-white version here simply because it has a greater number of flyers that can act as finishers should the opponent manage to stall the ground. There is good early aggression here and the Eight-and-a-Half-Tails can function as a finisher too but the blue-white deck has that extra evasion. The red-white deck has the two burn spells which act as removal to allow the attack to continue but they can also help deal the last few points if aimed directly at the opponent.

How does this deck win?

The Kami of Fire's Roar is a good way to force damage through but this deck has few Spiritcraft triggers for it so far and I don't think it's an automatic inclusion at this stage. When drafting this format it's always a good idea to keep a rough mental count of the number of Arcane spells and Spirit creatures you have. You need to be able to evaluate how important Spiritcraft effects are to you in addition to how highly you should evaluate the Splice and Soulshift mechanics. The red-white deck here potentially has three Spirits and two Arcane spells, and the blue-white deck has the same number right now although in reality it has a couple less as cards like Eye of Nowhere and Callous Deceiver hopefully won't make the cut.

Looking ahead to the *Betrayers* pack it's worth thinking about what the set would add to each of the three colours in this deck. White is fairly Spirit heavy with Waxmane Baku, Moonlit Strider and a few other Spirits being playable. Split-Tail Miko is obviously a great card in any deck too. Hundred-Talon Strike is the combat trick of choice here as you have a good aggressive deck and might be able to take advantage of its Arcane & splice effects.

From blue you'd probably be taking Shimmering Glasskite over Ninja of the Deep Hours simply because you probably won't want to sacrifice tempo and you don't have much cheap evasion. Again there are a few other Spirit and Arcane spells in blue that would make the cut.

Red's best card is Torrent of Stone and that's still true here although you wouldn't normally expect to be able to splice it as you have only two other Arcane cards and a comparatively low number of Mountains. Frostling would definitely be superior to Goblin Cohort in this deck as the Cohort doesn't work so well with some of your two-drops. You're not going to be casting Cohort on turn one and then Samurai of the Pale Curtain on turn two for example. It's still playable of course but Frostling is better once you get beyond turn four or so. Frost Ogre, Blademane Baku and First Volley would all probably be acceptable in this deck too.

Narrowing down the choices

So with all those things in mind let's take a look at the *Betrayers* pack that was opened:

- 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

It should be obvious that the only cards to be considered here are the white, red and blue ones. As good as Horobi's Whisper and Genju of the Cedars are you're not in a position where you can sacrifice four-five playable picks from another colour to take them. Neither of those two cards are particularly splashable anyway (although the Genju has only one coloured mana you still want a lot of Forests that you can put it on to make the most of it).

From the remaining on-colour cards I think it's fairly safe to dismiss Akki Blizzard-Herder, Minamo's Meddling and Heart of Light. There are much better cards here in each of those colours and as a result there's no reason why these three cards should be given more than a passing glance.

Cutting out those choices leaves the following as the possible picks:

- Soratami Mindsweeper
- Cunning Bandit
- Split-Tail Miko
- Mistblade Shinobi
- Frost Ogre
- Waxmane Baku

So, two on colour cards from each colour.

Before going any further I'm going to introduce the reader results from last week so we can see if they match up with this opinion:

Which card do you draft?		
Cunning Bandit	3777	31.1%
Waxmane Baku	1929	15.9%
Genju of the Cedars	1916	15.8%
Split-Tail Miko	1415	11.7%
Horobi's Whisper	1131	9.3%
Goryo's Vengeance	462	3.8%
Mistblade Shinobi	435	3.6%
Frost Ogre	282	2.3%

Soratami Mindsweeper	242	2.0%
Heart of Light	193	1.6%
Akki Blizzard-Herder	84	0.7%
Minamo's Meddling	82	0.7%
Harbinger of Spring	72	0.6%
Psychic Spear	58	0.5%
Roar of Jukai	50	0.4%
Total	12128	100.0%

The best white and red cards top the poll and that goes along with my own thoughts. Genju of the Cedars ranks a little more highly than I might expect but I can understand why people might be lured to the power of that card. As I said previously though, it's not a card that makes for a good splash. Typically, if you're splashing a colour you only run three lands of that colour and you only really want to draw one of those lands in a game. In that instance your opponent would only need to kill the Genju once before you'd find yourself without a Forest to enchant. You have to remember you can't enchant just any land with the Genjus, it has to be the appropriate basic land and with the colours this deck currently has there's no way you could run enough Forests to make the Genju powerful. Horobi's Whisper isn't playable for similar reasons. Although you can Splice it when you just have a single Swamp there aren't really enough Splice targets in this deck for that to be a realistic possibility. As powerful as the Whisper is you'd basically need to sacrifice an entire colour in order to squeeze enough Swamps into the deck to be able to hard-cast it, and you can't give up that many picks this late in a draft.

The remaining six

Moving on to the last six choices I'd start by tackling the two blue cards, as they're the weaker of the bunch. The Mindsweeper is a solid defender and does provide an alternative route to victory should you manage to lock up a game but in general it isn't that powerful. I'm also not really a fan of Mistblade Shinobi. It looks okay as an unsummon for one mana but you also have to recast the creature you returned to your hand so it's actually a lot more expensive than that. Leaving a residual 1/1 with no combat abilities isn't particularly exciting either. The red and white cards in this pack are much better than these two so no reason to talk at length about them.



The next thing to do is decide between the two red cards. Before I discuss those I'm going to open up the floor for some opinions from other players. Here's what a few Pros said about this pick:

Raphael Levy: So far, you have a WR deck with a few spirits and two-drops. It all comes down to four cards: Frost Ogre, Waxmane Baku, Split-Tail Miko and Cunning Bandit. The other white and red cards are irrelevant, and there's nothing in the other colours you really want to splash for. I would first put aside the Ogre, as it is in my opinion less efficient than any of the other three cards. Even though I love the card, the Miko wouldn't make it either. You already have four 2-drop creatures, and the other two fit better in the deck.

It's now between the Baku and the bandit. Your deck doesn't have many Spirits and Arcanes yet. If you don't get many more of them, you won't be able to use the Baku to its full potential, whereas two counters would turn the Bandit into a huge threat. If you get more Arcanes and Spirits, the Baku will be much more useful... but the Bandit will be even better than too.


So the Bandit would be my pick. Try to get more Spirits, especially 3cc ones (maybe some Waxmane Bakus?), and bigger ones maybe as you already have weenies. Some cheap Arcane spells wouldn't hurt either such as Hundred-Talon Strike, First Volley and Torrent of Stone.

Ken Krouner: You want to be Red White aggro here. While you only have about four cards at the moment that trigger Cunning Bandit, he is far and away the best card in the pack. You simply need to adjust your picks from here to make sure you get more Spirits and Arcane spells. This isn't a particularly hard pick.

Jeroen Remie: The choice seems to be between two of the new Ki counter guys, the Bandit or the white Baku. I would draft Waxmane Baku. It's the best common in the set, and I think it's as good as Cunning Bandit, if not better. I expect the deck to be a fast beatdown deck, and I think this card fits the curve, as well as the deck, perfectly. The  casting cost also seems a lot better than the  from the Bandit, especially if you end up having to splash the blue.

Anton Jonsson: The choice here is between Waxmane Baku and Split-Tail Miko. Our deck is probably White/Red but it could be White/Blue or White/Blue/Red (although hopefully not three colors), so at this point picking a White card will keep our options open. Also, the most interesting Red card (Cunning Bandit) would make our mana awful. In general, Waxmane Baku is just a better card than the Miko, but in this case it's at least somewhat close since we don't have a lot of Spirits/Arcanes to trigger the Baku. In the end though, I would still go with the Baku. My reasoning here is that the risk just isn't very high. Even if we don't get a lot of Spirits/Arcanes we still got an ok "dork" that will most probably make the cut.

Oh dear – a 2-2 split there. Guess I'll have to give the deciding vote then!

The Frost Ogre is a nice fatty and although it requires double-red in its casting cost that isn't terrible for a fifth turn play as you would hopefully have seen a couple of Mountains by then. You can also possibly wait a turn or two until you draw one if you have other things to do in the meantime. Cunning Bandit is definitely superior, but he's going to be very hard to cast early in the game given you have the two  creatures as well. In addition to that you need to cast at least two Arcane/Spirit spells before he does anything. That's by no means guaranteed in this deck although you would expect to pick up more Spirit and Arcane cards throughout *Betrayers*. Unlike Frost Ogre though Cunning Bandit isn't as good if you have to wait to cast him as you'll likely have to cast your other spells in order to stay in the game, thus making the Bandit a lot weaker when he comes into play late. Cunning Bandit is definitely the choice over the Ogre, and it's only really his casting cost that goes against him.

Of the two white cards it's generally accepted that the Baku is quite a lot better than the Miko in any deck that features a respectable number of cards that will trigger the Spiritcraft effect. Although this deck is currently lacking them you would expect to get some more throughout *Betrayers* as most of the best picks in white and red are Spirits or Arcane. Split-Tail Miko is a very solid card but I think you have to go with the Baku over it here, especially as this deck really needs something to force extra damage through. The Miko is good at letting your 2/2's attack into opposing 2/2s but it's not so good when you need to get your 2/2 past a 1/4.

So the choice inevitably comes down to Waxmane Baku vs. Cunning Bandit just as the Pros predicted. In a deck that had a lot of Spiritcraft and that didn't have to worry about mana costs Cunning Bandit would definitely be the superior pick for me. Its effect is quite brutal and it flips into a creature that hits very hard indeed when it gets through unblocked. However, mana requirements and spiritcraft counts *are* considerations and they shouldn't easily be dismissed.



This deck is already heavy white and has a couple of two-drops with casting costs of ******. Having another cheap creature with a casting cost of **1** is obviously not a good idea as a result. At this point in time I don't even think it's a 100% certainty that you're going to be playing the red cards. A second pick Yamabushi's Flame in pack one doesn't indicate much at all as cards like Glacial Ray and Blind with Anger could easily have been taken over it. With only one other playable red card making it to you in pack one it's quite possible the player to your right is drafting red. The comparatively late 7th pick Rainshaper and 10th pick River Kaijin from the first pack are a much better indicator that blue is being under-drafted to your right. So you may well end up with more blue cards than red in the final pack. It's possible you may run a heavy white deck that splashes both blue and red but in that instance Cunning Bandit isn't going to be playable either.

Overall the Bandit is slightly more powerful than the Baku but not so much so that it's worth taking a risk to draft it at this point. The Baku is a fantastic card and is one that is 100% guaranteed to make your main-deck. Also, much like the Bandit, it's only likely to improve in power as you draft more Spirits and Arcane from the following packs. Being a Spirit itself it's also going to make any additional Waxmane Bakus you pick up a lot better, as well as giving you a nice target for the Soulshift effect of Moonlit Strider which will be another common Spirit you could expect to pick up.

It's a very close choice once again, as demonstrated by the 2-2 split amongst the Pros. This pick basically comes down to power and risk, against consistency and security. The Bandit is the riskier pick as it hurts the deck's mana and might not even be playable in the final deck. The Baku is much safer as it's definitely playable but it might not be as powerful as the Bandit could be. If there were a massive power difference between the two cards I'd go along with the readers and choose the Bandit, but I'm more cautious than some players perhaps and I think along the same lines as Jeroen in believing that the Baku is actually very close to the power level of the Bandit in this deck. For that reason I'm going to throw my hat into the Waxmane Baku camp and select that card as my choice for the best pick from this pack.

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