

Scott Wills

Monday, March 07, 2005

Whenever you sit down across from a player who is piloting a two-colour deck you will normally find that they are playing two allied colours. It's not surprising of course, as the allied colours tend to have more in common than the opposing colours do and blue-white or red-green (for example) tend to just work better than other misaligned combinations.

In this block more than in previous ones we've seen the rise of several opposing colour combinations. Black-green can frequently be successful when focused on Spirits and Soulshift backed up by Devouring Greed. I've also discussed the white-red aggro-Samurai deck that is the preferred deck amongst some players. Today though I'm going to be tackling what is probably the most commonly drafted opposing colour combination: blue-red.

As colours go you don't get much more opposite than blue and red. In the most basic terms of what these colours stand for you have chaos vs. planning and freedom vs. control. Red wants to be aggressive and attacking all the time; blue wants to be a bit more controlling and take things slower. It's obvious to anyone that you wouldn't expect these two colours to cooperate but in this block they frequently do. This isn't the first time that we've seen this particular combination rise in popularity of course; I seem to remember a little card called Lavamancer's Skill that was quite popular a couple of years ago.



Just as the card Lavamancer's Skill was primarily responsible for the strength of the blue-red archetype in the *Onslaught* Block, we now have another red card – Glacial Ray – which is responsible for a lot of the power of blue-red in the *Champions* block limited format. The situation in *Champions* block is a little different in that Glacial Ray is far more playable in other colour combinations than Lavamancer's Skill was. It wasn't uncommon to get Lavamancer's Skills quite late in a triple-*Onslaught* draft if the other players were already entrenched in red-green or red-black. That obviously doesn't happen with Glacial Ray however. Fortunately there are a few other strategies you can employ if you find yourself in a position to draft this combination that will still let you win even if you aren't able to get those Glacial Rays that this deck really benefits from.

Spiritcraft and Splice

Blue and red are the only two colours in the block to not have any creatures with the Soulshift mechanic so there is no card advantage that can be gained through that. Instead, you must therefore turn to the Spiritcraft and Splice mechanics if you're looking for something to exploit.

There aren't many Spiritcraft effects in blue and red but the ones that do exist are very good. While other colours get to give a specific creature +1/+1, put a land into play, or untap a creature, you get to draw cards, deal damage and Earthquake all of your opponent's creatures.

The two commons that you're happy to see are Teller of Tales and Soul of Magma. Both these are useful in their own ways as the Teller can be used to tap down the biggest of your opponent's creatures whereas Soul of Magma can permanently dispose of the smaller ones. It goes without saying that the Teller is the preferred of the two even though it only stalls your opponent's creatures



rather than removing them permanently. It turns out that you don't usually need to stall your opponent for very long when you've got a 3/3 flyer bashing them about the head!

The best of the uncommons is obviously Earthshaker. It's a very large body but its ability is just ridiculous and tends to do very unfair things in a format that is dominated by cheap 2/2 creatures. Much like Glacial Ray, this is one of the cards that defines the archetype and if you open an Earthshaker then you should definitely be thinking about moving into blue-red if that is a possibility. Sire of the Storm is the other uncommon with a nice Spiritcraft trigger, and if you untap with one of these in play you'll often find the card advantage you can generate will overwhelm your opponent.

Now that's a very nice selection of cards you have available to you,

but you may notice they all have one thing in common: high mana costs! When the best cards for your deck all cost five or six mana then you have a bit of a problem. There are two ways of tackling this. The first is to simply try and make sure you are the aggressor in the game up until the point where you can cast your expensive guy. Most of the time you can find that the Teller or Sire will be the final nail in the coffin and you won't need too many Spirits or Arcane spells to help you push the game beyond the reach of your opponent. The second option is to slow your opponent down enough that you can survive until that point in the game and have enough life to still have time to take advantage of the powerful Spiritcraft triggers. This can be achieved through defensive creatures like River Kaijin or through bouncing or killing enough creatures to give you time to get to the mid-game. Soul of Magma only really works in a more controlling deck, simply because it isn't that big of a threat in its own right and it does need to be triggered a few times to do something useful.



The other place you can gain advantage is via the Splice mechanic. In this colour combination it's only really Glacial Ray that abuses the mechanic so you'd basically draft the Ray over virtually anything because of that. When you've managed to draft your first Glacial Ray then obviously subsequent ones should be drafted even higher. You'll also want to pick up any cards that help you find it. Eerie Procession is great but Peer Through Depths is also quite playable if you have a deck with a higher than average percentage of instants and sorceries.

To demonstrate what I'm talking about here are two examples of the different strategies you might employ in the more aggressive and more controlling versions of this archetype:

Blue-red Aggro



Main Deck
40 cards

9 Island	1 Battle-Mad Ronin	2 Consuming Vortex
9 Mountain	1 Brutal Deceiver	1 Devouring Rage
<hr/>	1 Cunning Bandit	1 First Volley
18 lands	1 Earthshaker	1 Glacial Ray
	1 Ember-Fist Zubera	1 Toils of Night and Day
	1 Floating-Dream Zubera	<hr/>
	1 Frostling	6 other spells
	1 Goblin Cohort	
	1 Hearth Kami	
	1 Kami of Fire's Roar	
	1 Ronin Houndmaster	
	1 Shimmering Glasskite	
	1 Soratami Cloudskater	
	1 Soratami Mirror-Guard	
	1 Soratami Rainshaper	
	1 Teller of Tales	
	<hr/>	
	16 creatures	

Blue-red Control



Main Deck

40 cards

9 Island	1 Earthshaker	1 Consuming Vortex
9 Mountain	1 Ember-Fist Zubera	1 Counsel of the Soratami
<hr/>	1 Floating-Dream Zubera	1 Eerie Procession
18 lands	1 Frostling	1 Eye of Nowhere
	1 Frostwielder	1 Glacial Ray
	1 Ninja of the Deep Hours	1 Psychic Puppetry
	2 River Kaijin	1 Reach Through Mists
	1 Shimmering Glasskite	2 Sift Through Sands
	1 Soratami Cloudskater	1 Yamabushi's Flame
	1 Soul of Magma	<hr/>
	1 Teller of Tales	10 other spells
	<hr/>	
	12 creatures	

The differences between those two listings are fairly obvious. The aggro version has a higher creature count, more evasion, and a couple of cards that can function as finishers, too. The controlling version has a slower curve and relies much more heavily on defensive creatures in the early turns of a game to try and slow the opponent down. It's also happier to spend time drawing cards and gaining advantage that way. Once it does get a Teller or Earthshaker into play though it's in a much better position to take advantage of them.

“Shoot you for one”

Another often over-looked aspect of red is its 'pinging' abilities ('pinging' is the ability to deal one damage to a target, usually a creature) that are present in significant numbers in this block. By themselves cards like Frostwielder and Soul of Magma can annoy an opponent but when you get them in multiples you can really start to apply the pressure.

The cards to look out for are Frostwielder, Soul of Magma, Honden of Infinite Rage, Initiate of Blood and Nine-Ringed Bo. The latter two have restrictions on them but when used in concert with the rest they'll almost always prove useful. *Betrayers* doesn't have any permanent pingers but both First Volley and Frostling can be used to provide that extra point of damage necessary to kill off a bigger creature. Both of those two cards are also useful to trigger Spiritcraft effects so they definitely have a place in this archetype.

It's quite nice to be able to sit there with a Frostwielder and Soul of Magma in play and still be able to take out a Scaled Hulk by casting the First Volley and Splicing Psychic Puppetry onto it to get an additional point of damage out of your Frostwielder! Those sorts of situations sound rare but when a large part of your deck is based around that sort of synergy they happen a lot more often than you might think. Remember that you can use your Tellers to untap your Frostwielders instead of tapping your opponent's creatures, too.



The more you get, the more they add up!

Ire of Kaminari

The last type of blue-red deck tends to be very Arcane heavy and relies even more on Glacial Ray as a re-usable kill method. It can still have aspects of the controlling blue-red decks too, but it runs a higher number of Arcane cards so that it's able to take full advantage of Ire of Kaminari from *Betrayers*.

This common is basically unplayable in the vast majority of decks but once you get a lot of Arcane cards present in one deck it actually becomes very playable. With *Betrayers* being a smaller set it's not impossible to pick up Torrent of Stone and First Volley in the first few picks and then table any Ire of Kaminari's that might be opened.

This is a deck-list I posted a couple of weeks back but it illustrates exactly the sort of deck that you're looking for if you're hoping to have the Ires become playable in the last pack. It also demonstrates how you might fit in the other themes like pinging and Spiritcraft into one deck.

Ire of Kaminari		
Main Deck 40 cards		
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
		16 other spells

Weaknesses

As well as knowing how to draft these two colours it's also worth knowing how to beat them as well.

Most commonly just some fast, solid creatures backed up by spot removal will do the trick against the controlling deck. The blue-red deck isn't all that fast, even when it is the aggressive version that's being played, so it's not uncommon that you can race it and hurt them so much that the Teller or Sire isn't enough to swing the game around.

The aggressive version also relies heavily on flyers for its attack and so cards like Matsu-Tribe Sniper and even Venerable Kumo are very good against them.

Against the more controlling version discard is often quite nasty. If you can use a Distress or Psychic Spear to take out their good Arcane spell you can leave them with a lot of sub-optimal cards and nothing useful to Splice onto them for example. Heart of Light is another very good sideboard card as it can completely shut down Frostwielders and even Earthshaker. You'll give them an invulnerable blocker but they're normally quite light on creatures anyway so you would hopefully have enough guys to be able to swarm around that.

Next Week

It's time for another *Betrayers* draft pick so below you'll find a situation and a poll for you to fill in and next week I'll go through the results.

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

1. Kabuto Moth
2. Befoul
3. Devouring Greed
4. Jugan, the Rising Star
5. Rootrunner
6. Orochi Sustainer
7. Order of the Sacred Bell
8. Nezumi Ronin
9. Orochi Leafcaller

10. Serpent Skin
11. Venerable Kumo
12. Guardian of Solitude
13. Pious Kitsune
14. Wear Away
15. Desperate Ritual

Pack two gave you the following picks:

1. Kumano, Master Yamabushi
2. Cage of Hands
3. Moss Kami
4. Scuttling Death
5. Kodama's Reach
6. Kami of the Hunt
7. Soilshaper
8. Marrow-Gnawer
9. Dripping-Tongue Zubera
10. Oni Possession
11. Kashi-Tribe Warriors
12. Orochi Leafcaller
13. Ore Gorger
14. Field of Reality
15. Vigilance

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





Which card do you draft?

Which card do you draft?

- Patron of the Kitsune
- Unchecked Growth

- Genju of the Fens
- Cunning Bandit
- Okiba-Gang Shinobi
- Moonlit Strider
- Phantom Wings
- Torrent of Stone
- Roar of Jukai
- Takenuma Bleeder
- Crack the Earth
- Ninja of the Deep Hours
- Blessing of Leeches
- Gnarled Mass
- Kami of False Hope

Submit

© 1995-2009 Wizards of the Coast LLC, a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Statement](#)

