

# When Card Pools Go Bad

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This is going to be my last Limited Information column for a few weeks, as I'm disappearing off to Canada to get married in a few days' time. While I could possibly write an article while we're honeymooning on a nice sunny beach somewhere, to be honest with you all, I'll probably have better things to do! A guest columnist will be taking over for the next three weeks, but I will be back the following week with more Limited analysis for you. In the meantime, we have a Sealed Deck pool from last week up for discussion and that is going to be the topic for today's column.

As a reminder, here's the pool I'll be discussing. You can download a Magic Online .DEC file of it too if you like.

## White

1 Bushi Tenderfoot  
1 Cage of Hands  
1 Call to Glory  
1 Genju of the Fields  
1 Heart of Light  
1 Hundred-Talon Strike  
1 Kami of False Hope  
1 Kami of Old Stone  
1 Kitsune Diviner  
1 Lantern Kami  
1 Mending Hands  
1 Patron of the Kitsune  
1 Pious Kitsune  
1 Reverse the Sands  
1 Terashi's Verdict

## Red

1 Akki Avalanchers  
1 Akki Blizzard-Herder  
1 Battle-Mad Ronin  
1 Clash of Realities  
1 Crack the Earth  
1 Goblin Cohort  
1 Kami of Fire's Roar  
1 Lava Spike  
1 Shinka Gatekeeper  
1 Strange Inversion  
1 Torrent of Stone  
1 Unearthly Blizzard  
1 Unnatural Speed

## Blue

1 Dampen Thought  
1 Floating-Dream Zuberu  
1 Floodbringer  
1 Jetting Glasskite  
1 Kaijin of the Vanishing Touch  
1 Kami of Twisted Reflection  
1 Ninja of the Deep Hours  
1 Psychic Puppetry  
1 Quillmane Baku  
1 Reach Through Mists  
1 Shimmering Glasskite  
1 Soratami Mirror-Guard  
1 Squelch  
1 Teller of Tales  
1 Thoughtbind  
1 Veil of Secrecy

## Green

1 Forked-Branch Garami  
1 Honden of Life's Web  
1 Joyous Respite  
1 Kashi-Tribe Warriors  
1 Kodama's Might  
1 Order of the Sacred Bell  
1 Orochi Eggwatcher  
1 Petalmane Baku  
1 Sakura-Tribe Elder  
1 Sakura-Tribe Springcaller  
1 Scaled Hulk  
1 Serpent Skin  
1 Vital Surge  
1 Wear Away

## Black

1 Ashen-Skin Zuberu  
1 Bile Urchin  
1 Blessing of Leeches  
1 Cursed Ronin  
1 Gutwrencher Oni  
1 Kami of Lunacy  
1 Kami of the Waning Moon  
1 Kokusho, the Evening Star  
1 Rend Spirit  
1 Skullmane Baku  
1 Takenuma Bleeder  
2 Villainous Ogre  
1 Wicked Akuba

## Artifact & Land

1 General's Kabuto  
1 Gods' Eye, Gate to the Reikai  
1 Pinecrest Ridge

The first thing to do when tackling a Sealed Deck build like this is to remove all of the cards that you're never going to want to play. You should leave in anything that might be playable under the right circumstances (such as Unearthly Blizzard) but remove anything that you never want to play (such as Unnatural Speed).

Once this is done I also then like to pare down each colour to its best cards so you can use those as a starting point for the build.

### White

- 1 Cage of Hands
- 1 Genju of the Fields
- 1 Heart of Light
- 1 Hundred-Talon Strike
- 1 Kami of False Hope
- 1 Kami of Old Stone
- 1 Kitsune Diviner
- 1 Patron of the Kitsune
- 1 Terashi's Verdict

### Blue

- 1 Floating-Dream Zuberu
- 1 Floodbringer
- 1 Jetting Glasskite
- 1 Kaijin of the Vanishing Touch
- 1 Ninja of the Deep Hours
- 1 Reach Through Mists
- 1 Shimmering Glasskite
- 1 Soratami Mirror-Guard
- 1 Teller of Tales
- 1 Veil of Secrecy

### Black

- 1 Ashen-Skin Zuberu
- 1 Cursed Ronin
- 1 Gutwrencher Oni
- 1 Kami of Lunacy
- 1 Kami of the Waning Moon
- 1 Kokusho, the Evening Star
- 1 Rend Spirit
- 1 Skullmane Baku
- 1 Takenuma Bleeder
- 2 Villainous Ogre
- 1 Wicked Akuba

### Red

- 1 Akki Avalanchers
- 1 Battle-Mad Ronin
- 1 Goblin Cohort
- 1 Kami of Fire's Roar
- 1 Torrent of Stone

### Green

- 1 Forked-Branch Garami
- 1 Kodama's Might
- 1 Order of the Sacred Bell
- 1 Orochi Eggwatcher
- 1 Petalmane Baku
- 1 Sakura-Tribe Elder
- 1 Sakura-Tribe Springcaller
- 1 Scaled Hulk
- 1 Serpent Skin

### Artifact & Land

- 1 General's Kabuto
- 1 Pinecrest Ridge

It's then worth spending a few minutes just looking at the strengths and weaknesses of each colour.

### White

White is lacking depth but it has a lot going for it. It has two solid removal spells in Cage of Hands and Terashi's Verdict and one other that could be useful in Heart of Light. Its creatures are generally weak but they're good at playing the defensive role as Kitsune Diviner, Kami of Old Stone and the Genju are good for controlling the ground. It also has a decent late-game bomb in the Patron and there's a chance you could get it into play at Instant speed as a surprise combat trick if you were prepared to sacrifice the Diviner.



### Blue

There's a nice mana curve here with respectable cheap creatures and some nice late-game flyers as well. There's some nice synergy with the Mirror-Guard and the Ninja, too. There's not much in the way of tricks, as the Veil is the only true spell in the colour and while it is playable, it's also situational and won't always be useful when you draw it in the mid-game.

### Black

This colour is perhaps the deepest of all of them with 12 cards that are potentially playable. It'll probably end up making up one of the colours of the deck as a result. It has some good aggressive creatures and there are a lot of Ogres to negate the drawback of the Gutwrencher Oni, too. It does however have a very high mana curve with two five-drops and two six-drops as well, and on top of that it has a very weak removal base for a colour that you'd normally hope to be your strongest in that area. Kokusho is an excellent finisher but this deck already has a lot of them.

## Red

From that list we can already see it's safe to dismiss red as a main-deck colour. There are a very low number of good cards and it will never be enough to make up a main colour. Torrent of Stone is the only card that could really be considered for a splash colour. The rest of the cards are quite aggressive and need to come into play early in the game, which you can't always rely on for a splash colour.

## Green

Green is solid, if a little unexciting. There's a good range of creatures here and a couple of combat tricks, too. Forked-Branch Garami is a great card and there will probably be a few spirits in any deck that gets built, meaning its Soulshift abilities will likely come into play. You'd like a little more depth, but with solid creatures and some respectable mana fixers you shouldn't ignore this colour right away.

## Overall

In general I'd say this pool is pretty weak. There are a lot of great expensive cards, but in reality there are too many of them and not enough solid cheaper commons. There's a distinct lack of removal -- in a Sealed Deck environment, that is going to hurt you. In addition, all of your best cards are separated out amongst the colours and it's going to be very hard to get them in the same deck together.



## Trying for two colours

My first attempt at building a Sealed Deck is usually to see if it would be possible to create a two-coloured deck, and if so, whether that deck is viable. In this situation, I would look at the blue and black cards initially as they are the deepest colours and they seem to go well together. If we throw together all the good cards from those colours we get:

- 1CC: Reach Through Mists
- 2CC: Floating-Dream Zuberá, Ashen-Skin Zuberá, Kaijin of the Vanishing Touch, Floodbringer, Veil of Secrecy, Wicked Akuba
- 3CC: Kami of the Waning Moon, 2 x Villainous Ogre, Takenuma Bleeder, Rend Spirit
- 4CC: Ninja of the Deep Hours, Shimmering Glasskite, Soratami Mirror-Guard, Cursed Ronin, General's Kabuto
- 5CC: Teller of Tales, Gutwrencher Oni, Skullmane Baku
- 6CC: Jetting Glasskite, Kami of Lunacy, Kokusho, the Evening Star

That's a total of 23 cards, which is almost certainly one too many as you'd want to run 18 lands in a deck with that many expensive cards.



The deck looks okay on paper, but in reality it actually has a lot of problems. First of all, it has a pretty bad mana curve. It only has one aggressive two-drop and yet has a bunch of Ogres that really want to be attacking. If your opponent leads out with a start like Kami of Ancient Law on turn two and Ronin Houndmaster on turn three, you're really going to be struggling to block those or race them -- more so because you don't have removal or bounce, which might let you regain lost tempo. This deck's expensive creatures are good at winning long games but the deck looks like it would have trouble stabilising as its early creatures are pretty weak at doing that. It's also very, very light on removal, and just one bomb creature from your opponent could be game over. If your opponent drops Kumano or Meloku you can literally scoop up your cards as you have zero ways of dealing with them. In Sealed Deck you tend to meet a lot of decks with bombs, and a slow deck that can't get rid of them is exactly what you don't want to be playing.

This deck is also lacking ways to gain card advantage. Both Spice and Soulshift are excellent ways of gaining an advantage over an opponent and this deck is lacking in both.

Overall you want to play either an aggressive deck or a controlling one, and this deck has too much of both strategies. You can see this deck playing out a second-turn Kaijin of the Vanishing Touch to hold off opposing 2/2s but then it goes and plays a third-turn Villainous Ogre which then brings those 2/2s back into the game as potential blockers. This deck has plenty of playable cards but I don't think they really work well together.

## Choosing your strategy

When building a deck from a weak pool of cards, you really need to focus on building a solid overall deck, as you won't have the sheer power to overwhelm people when you don't have a lot of great cards. This usually means choosing whether your deck is going to be controlling or aggressive, and deciding upon a route to victory. Are you going to stall the game and then win with evasive creatures? Are you going to win a war of attrition through the use of the Soulshift mechanic? Are you going to try and get in a lot of early damage and then finish the game with cards like Unearthly Blizzard or Devouring Rage/Greed? When building your deck you should look at how it's going to win the game and decide which colours and which cards to include based on that decision.

If you're looking to go the control route with this deck, I think you need to look at pairing the white cards with the blue ones. If we take a look at this, we get the following:

- 1CC: Kami of False Hope, Kitsune Diviner, Genju of the Fields, Mending Hands
- 2CC: Floodbringer, Floating-Dream Zubera, Kaijin of the Vanishing Touch, Terashi's Verdict, Veil of Secrecy
- 3CC: Cage of Hands, Heart of Light

4CC: Kami of Old Stone, Ninja of the Deep Hours, Shimmering Glasskite, Soratami Mirror-Guard, General's Kabuto  
5CC: Teller of Tales  
6CC: Jetting Glasskite, Patron of the Kitsune  
8CC: Reverse the Sands

I've moved Mending Hands into this deck over Hundred-Talon Strike as there's little opportunity to Splice it, and it's a better defensive card in a deck with a lot of low-power blockers. I've also brought Reverse the Sands back in, as this is a deck which will aim to stall and make it to the late game and Reverse the Sands can be excellent in exchanging your low life total for your opponent's high total, allowing you to get a quick attack in with a flyer and kill them right away.

This listing is only 20 cards, though, so another two cards will need to be found. Both red and black have suitable splash cards in Torrent of Stone and Rend Spirit, but Torrent is the better of the two by a good margin. Unfortunately neither of those colours have any other cards that really warrant splashing in this deck and so I think you'd have to go back to the unplayable pile to see what cards were initially dismissed. The three best options would probably be the Hundred-Talon Strike, Thoughtbind and Kami of Twisted Reflection. None of these are ideal, but they're just about playable. If you wanted to stick with two colours you could add two of those three and then just include 18 lands for a two-colour deck.



The other option is to try to utilise the black cards in some sort of aggressive deck. If that were the case, I think you'd be best off pairing them up with the green cards as green has some quality creatures and its two combat tricks are best utilised in an aggressive deck. Serpent Skin especially is nice in a deck where you have 3/2 monsters attacking into 2/2s on turn four, as your opponent will frequently block in that situation. Putting the green and black cards together gives:

1CC: Kodama's Might  
2CC: Petalmane Baku, Sakura-Tribe Elder, Ashen-Skin Zubera, Wicked Akuba  
3CC: Orochi Eggwatcher, Serpent Skin, Kami of the Waning Moon, Rend Spirit, Takenuma Bleeder, 2 x Villainous Ogre  
4CC: Order of the Sacred Bell, Sakura-Tribe Springcaller, Cursed Ronin, General's Kabuto  
5CC: Forked-Branch Garami, Gutwrencher Oni, Skullmane Baku  
6CC: Scaled Hulk, Kami of Lunacy, Kokusho, the Evening Star

Personally I think that deck looks weaker than the control version. In any aggressive deck you really want to have several creatures that have two power in the two mana slot and unfortunately this card pool just doesn't support that. This deck also has a greater number of weaker cards in it, with Ashen-Skin Zubera, Cursed Ronin, Orochi Eggwatcher and Skullmane Baku all being far from optimal in this style of deck.

You'd also really need to splash a third colour here although that is made a lot easier by the addition of Sakura-Tribe Elder and Petalmane Baku. Unfortunately the two cards you really would like to splash -- Patron of the Kitsune and Teller of Tales -- aren't easily splashed. You could try to run the double-coloured splash with these two cards alongside Cage of Hands or Shimmering Glasskite/Soratami Mirror-Guard, but you might find them sitting in your hand a lot of the time if you don't draw one of your two mana fixers.

The final option I would consider is just to throw six swamps, six plains and six islands in as your lands and play all of the best cards from black, white and blue regardless of their mana cost. With so many double-casting cost spells this is asking for trouble but in a weak pool like this it might be your best plan. This deck would look something like this:

- 1CC: Genju of the Fields, Kitsune Diviner
- 2CC: Terashi's Verdict, Floating-Dream Zuberu, Wicked Akuba
- 3CC: Cage of Hands, Rend Spirit, Takenuma Bleeder, 2 x Villainous Ogre, Kami of the Waning Moon
- 4CC: Kami of Old Stone, Ninja of the Deep Hours, Shimmering Glasskite, Soratami Mirror-Guard, General's Kabuto
- 5CC: Teller of Tales, Gutwrencher Oni
- 6CC: Patron of the Kitsune, Jetting Glasskite, Kokusho, the Evening Star, Kami of Lunacy

That isn't pretty but it's a viable choice.

## Deciding on the build

Making the final decision when you have a pool like this one is tough. A lot of people would say that it's simply a matter of personal choice but I don't really subscribe to that point of view. At the end of the day, one of these decks (or perhaps even a deck I haven't considered) is the "best deck" you can build from this pool.

Unfortunately it's very difficult to predict which one that is based on theory alone. All the decks are fairly weak but close to one another in terms of power. Without extensive testing, it's unlikely you could come up with the right answer just by looking at each deck. When you find yourself in this situation your only option is to go with your gut instinct and pick the deck you think you can play best. You might not be picking the "best deck" but perhaps going with the deck that best fits your personal play style will mean that you're able to overcome the deck's deficiencies more easily.

My instinct here tells me to go with the blue-white control deck. It has the highest number of removal spells and I believe it would be the best deck with which to stall the early game, thus allowing the more powerful late-game cards to have a bigger impact on the game. I'd probably add two Mountains and the Torrent of Stone as a splash. I think I'd also add Thoughtbind over the Hundred-Talon Strike simply because the deck is fairly light on creatures and you might be lacking a suitable target for the strike. The deck is also short on three-drops, so adding the Thoughtbind gives you something to do with your mana on the third turn. Adding these gives a final deck list of:

Limited Information		
Main Deck		
40 cards		
8 Island	1 Floating-Dream Zuberu	1 Cage of Hands
2 Mountain	1 Floodbringer	1 General's Kabuto
8 Plains	1 Jetting Glasskite	1 Genju of the Fields
18 lands	1 Kaijin of the Vanishing Touch	1 Heart of Light
	1 Kami of False Hope	1 Mending Hands
	1 Kami of Old Stone	1 Reverse the Sands
	1 Kitsune Diviner	1 Terashi's Verdict
	1 Ninja of the Deep Hours	1 Thoughtbind

1 Patron of the Kitsune  
1 Shimmering Glasskite  
1 Soratami Mirror-Guard  
1 Teller of Tales

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12 creatures

1 Torrent of Stone  
1 Veil of Secrecy

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10 other spells

It's not a great deck by any means, but I think it stands a chance of being able to stall the ground long enough for your flyers and your two powerful six-drops to swing the game for you.

That's it for this week. The next three weeks will feature the guest columnist as I mentioned previously, so I'll see you all again in about a month!

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