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Let's get back to the world of Kamigawa. In other words, let's talk legends. In a previous article —“Three of Kamigawa's Champions”—I discussed the development of three of the legendary creatures from that set. With *Betrayers* now in the mix, it only makes sense that I do the same for three of that set's prominent figures, all of whom happen to be 2/2 creatures.

Hokori, Dust Drinker

Ah, Winter Orb. What better card to discuss in light of all of Mr. Rosewater's talk of fun?

Most cards are not fun to lose to repeatedly. The first time you lose to Meloku, for instance, you might say, “Whoa. That guy is really solid. Cool.” After losing to him for the eleventh straight game, I'd expect something more along the lines of “[scoops up cards] Screw that stupid card. I hate him.” Players enjoy diversity of game play, and getting hammered by the same card game in and game out isn't very rewarding.

Winter Orb, in its heyday, reached “Screw-that-stupid-card” status pretty quickly. There are powerful cards out there that win the game quickly, like *Rude Awakening* and *Darksteel Colossus*. Winter Orb was never one of those cards. When the Orb came down, it said, “You're done playing, even though this game might take another hour. Please sit back and relax while I figure out how to kill you.”



It was cheap, colorless, and easy to abuse (tapping it shut it off, so its controller could use an *Icy Manipulator*, *Relic Barrier*, or *Opposition* to reclaim his own untap steps, while still denying his opponents). The designers of *Betrayers* decided to revisit the Orb, but without all of its hidden strengths—it wouldn't be colorless, easy to abuse, or quite as cheap. “Worber” was handed over to development as a 1/3 legendary creature version of *Rising Waters* (a later iteration of the Winter Orb effect) for 1***.

For every handful of players that disliked Winter Orb, there was the guy who loved it --typically the guy with it in his deck. Players love powerful effects that they can feel clever by working around, and the Orb is the picture of such a card. R&D looked to be divided; half of us were the prior disgruntled victims of Winter Orb abuse, and half of us were nostalgic for the days of denying opponents even a moment with two untapped lands.

RB 1/21: Potentially interesting constructed card. We haven't had mana control in FFL in years, and in will play well with all the artifact mana in *Mirrodin*. Making mana vulnerable might be dangerous, but I think it's actually ok given how little mana control has been in constructed for the last many years.

Developer Devin Low, who probably has more games of *Masques* Block Constructed under his belt than anyone else in the department, was quick to point out the stranglehold that *Rising Waters* had on that format, a sentiment that Matt Place echoed in a later comment: “...While I remember Winter Orb with fond memories, I also remember how *Rising Waters* led to one of the least diverse formats in Magic's history.”

Lead developer Henry Stern and the rest of the dev team, while sympathetic to worries about the card, went forward with the version the design team handed over. It didn't take long for a change to be necessary. The three toughness made it immune to most of the cheap removal in Standard (Shock, Magma Jet, Pyroclasm) and the block's most common sweeper (Hideous Laughter). With Eiganjo Castle and Shining Shoal providing defense, Worber proved harder to get off the table than the original Winter Orb. AND he could block Hearth Kami or Eternal Witness and live to tell the tale.

So Henry's team knocked him down to 0/2 in an attempt to make him easier to remove. In my opinion, that really damaged his status as a legend. He already had an ability that would actually be detrimental in multiples to its own effectiveness, and now zero power? What kind of legend is that? Aesthetics aside, the card was still proving brutal at three mana. Paul Barclay went so far as to call it "one of the least fun cards" we'd made in a long time.

But Randy and those in his camp were still correct. He did allow for some interesting deck design and his presence in our metagame did interesting things to sideboards and play decisions. Henry was determined to find the right place for him.

Hokori, Dust Drinker eventually wound up as a 2/2 for **2****, which solved all the problems. He has acceptable stats for a legend, and he is in a good place for constructed. He can still have a decent impact, but he by no means is unsolvable. Interesting, yet not oppressive. Well done! I fully expect to see his dusty presence in some capacity at the upcoming block Pro Tour.

Kira, Great Glass-Spinner



Yes, Randy Buehler, Director of **Magic** R&D, has an infant daughter named Kira that was born suspiciously within the timeframe that *Betrayers* was wrapping up in-house. I have been assured by both Randy and Brandon Bozzi, headmaster of card names for the set, that it is purely coincidence. I'd buy it if the card was any other color but blue...

Kira, Jetting Glasskite, and Shimmering Glasskite came in from design as a mini-cycle with the same abilities they have now (then-Rules Manager Paul Barclay was stunned that the original intended functionality actually worked). The big difference was that the rare (Kira) was the largest of the three.

Henry and the team changed her size, commenting that they wanted to both "break up our small/medium/big pattern" and enable a potential blue creature-based deck.

On the first point, I appreciate the team's vision with making this change because I'm not a fan of falling into patterns (which can often be hard to avoid). We so often make the common creature with an ability the smallest one, and the rare the largest—think Phyrexian Plaguelord and his Carrier friends from *Urza's Destiny*, or the Penumbra Wurm family, or the Symbiotic Wurm family, or the Laccolith Titan family, etc. Power isn't always a function of size, as evidenced by Kira. In constructed play, she is a much stronger card than her larger relatives, often because she isn't the problem creature; instead, she just provides a shield for whatever better monsters you may have in play. (In limited, however, the uncommon 4/4 is such a house that Kira can't compare.)

After the change, Kira was a 2/2 flier for **2**—stats identical to the canonical Wind Drake. Some developers didn't like Wind Drake being displaced so carelessly, even though Kira's legendary status kept her from being strictly better, so her mana cost was altered to **1**.

Shirei, Shizo's Caretaker

I can't dig up the original submitted text for this guy at the moment, but reading over the development comments and remembering my own experiences with it, it was something like this:

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Shirei
3B
Legendary Creature
2/2
Whenever a creature with 1 power or less is put
into a graveyard from play, return that creature to
play under your control at end of turn.
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Here's what that meant:

1. You got your opponent's creatures when they died.
So if your opponent sacrificed a Sakura-Tribe Elder, you'd get it and be able to use it every turn from there on out. Similarly, if you reduced an opponent's creature's power to 1 or less and then killed it, you'd get it. So a Sickening Shoal on an opponent's Kumano for 4 would net you one Master Yamabushi.
2. If Shirei's power was 1 or less when he died, he'd bring himself back. The correct play was often to hold a Shoal or an Echoing Decay to kill your own Shirei in response to him dying in some other way. That way you'd get him back. Later, the popular plan was to combine Shirei with Night of Souls' Betrayal, keeping him a 1/1. Eternal Witnesses would come into play as 1/0's, die, regrow a card, come back into play at the end of turn, die again, regrow another card, and come back at the end of every turn until someone broke up the combo. Gross.



Paul Barclay did us all a favor by changing the template to fix problem #2. The new wording meant that you'd only get creatures back if Shirei was in play at the end of the turn, and he could never return himself to play.

Of course, problem #1 still persisted. Because Sickening Shoal, Echoing Decay, and to a lesser extend Night of Souls' Betrayal (affectionately called "-1/-1 World" around here -- we are so poetic...) were all very good cards even without Shirei, it was no trouble to build Shirei antics into already solid black-green decks. The development team eventually changed him to only affect your creatures, which I honestly feel is a great change. He is now a cool "build around me" card that forces you to make a deck that can utilize his ability, rather than just a guy that makes your already-good removal spells into something downright unfair.

In closing, here is a deck that Devin Low was playing around with internally while we were still deciding what to do with Shirei. His creature base shows what cool stuff this little legend is still capable of doing. Note that at this point, Kira's mana cost contained only a single ♠.

FFL Shirei CraziNESS		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
13 Forest	3 Echoing Decay	2 Bottle Gnomes
2 Island	2 Naturalize	2 Daring Apprentice
1 Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers	4 Time of Need	1 Echoing Decay
		2 Elvish Scrapper
		1 Kiku, Night's Flower
	9 other spells	

1 Shizo, Death's Storehouse	2 Kira, Great Glass-Spinner
5 Swamp	4 Lose Hope
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22 lands	1 Naturalize
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	15 sideboard cards
4 Birds of Paradise	
2 Bottle Gnomes	
4 Eternal Witness	
1 Glissa Sunseeker	
1 Kira, Great Glass-Spinner	
1 Kodama of the North Tree	
4 Sakura-Tribe Elder	
4 Shirei, Shizo's Caretaker	
4 Triskelion	
4 Wizard Replica	
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29 creatures	

Last Week's Poll:

Which of the following deck types do you least like playing against?		
Counterspells	4886	33.6%
Land Destruction	4021	27.6%
Fast Combo	2679	18.4%
None of the above	1073	7.4%
Weenies	967	6.6%
Discard	923	6.3%
Total	14549	100.0%

This Week's Poll:

Which of these Organized Play programs do you attend at least once per month?

Arena only
 Friday Night **Magic** only
 Both Arena and Friday Night **Magic**
 Neither

