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Hello again, and welcome once more to your weekly dose of Limited Information. As most of you are probably aware, I had a brief hiatus recently and during my month off I have to confess I didn't even do so much as look at a magical card, never mind actually play a game.

Fortunately for me, there weren't any really significant developments in that time. We haven't had a Limited Pro Tour and we haven't had a new set come out either (although I hear rumours that the *Saviors of Kamigawa* previews aren't that far away now). Everyone has more or less come to grips with the addition of *Betrayers* to our *Champions* drafts and figuring out how the various archetypes have changed. Despite that, the time off from **Magic** had left me feeling a little rusty and I figured I should probably get straight back on the horse, so to speak.

Just as I was downloading the latest **Magic Online** updates, I decided that I would make my first draft back on said horse the topic of today's column. Draft walkthroughs are not something I've ever done before in this column, but we're at a point in time where things are fairly stable and there isn't a whole lot to say about the format that people haven't heard many times before. So let's just call this an experiment. If you like the format of today's article, drop me an e-mail or post on the message boards and let me know. Similarly, if you hate it then please make your voice heard too and I won't repeat it.

Once I was logged on I headed over to the draft room, and after handing over my two tickets and my three packs I jumped into the first available draft. This is one of the best things about **Magic Online**. Nowhere else could I decide to draft at 10 p.m. and find myself in a game just five minutes later.

Pack One

Cracking the first pack open, I quickly checked the rare to see if I had an obvious pick ahead of me. The rare was Vassal's Duty. Well I guess it *is* obvious in that I obviously won't be taking it, but still not what I hoped for. The remainder of the pack shaped up like this:



Not a whole lot of power in that pack, really. The only viable picks for me were Soulless Revival, Soratami Rainshaper, Kodama's Might, Soilshaper and Ghostly Prison. I dismissed the Soilshaper in preference for the Kodama's Might. Soilshaper is a fine card but I personally prefer the cheap

reusable combat trick. Revival was the next to go as it's just not that powerful a card and is very slow and situational.

So the choices basically came down to Soratami Rainshaper, Ghostly Prison and Kodama's Might. I think Ghostly Prison is probably the right pick there in terms of power. Prison is one of those cards you either love or hate, I think. Some games it completely destroys your opponent's offence, allowing you to easily win a combat damage race. Other games your opponent pays 2 and hits you with his Moss Kami or Frost Ogre a couple of times and then you die. I personally don't like the Prison very much as a good white deck should be able to hold the ground or race well enough without it.

I would've still taken Prison over Might simply because Might is a green card and I would normally avoid drafting that colour (if possible). I'm also not a big fan of white at this point in time, either. It has way too many one-power guys and you can often find yourself unable to win games with white as your main colour, so I was a lot less inclined to take the white card than I might otherwise have been. That only leaves the Rainshaper. I really like two-power flyers for three mana, especially when they have a useful ability attached. Right now blue-red is one of the more powerful colour combinations, and as there were no good red cards in this pack as well as no more good blue cards, I figured I might be able to cut both colours from this pack and set my neighbours into white or green -- which would give me a good run of picks in pack two. With that in mind, I went with Rainshaper over Prison. This is more of a personal preference, and a pick based on colour choice rather than a pick I'd necessarily recommend to everyone, but I was happy with it.



Second-pick playables: Wicked Akuba, Indomitable Will, Cage of Hands, Kami of Lunacy. The rare passed to me was a Hall of the Bandit Lord.

A common was missing from the pack, but with little in terms of power in this pack it's difficult to know what it was. It was most likely a red removal spell, as I think most people would take Cage of Hands over cards such as Rend Flesh, Moss Kami or Soratami Mirror Guard.

The only real choice from this pack is Wicked Akuba or Cage of Hands. I like both blue-white and blue-black but I was very much aware with this pack that I'd just passed a good white card while passing nothing in black. I've always liked the Akuba and he's still great in blue-black. Many players discount him due to his awkward casting cost, but I find most of my blue-black decks will run 10-11 Swamps and only a few Islands to support the flyers which almost always only have a single blue mana in their casting cost. Blue-black decks tend to run Phantom Wings in an effort to get their Ninja through, and the Akuba is a fine target for that particular enchantment too. Cage is definitely the better card here, but at this stage I suspect the player to my left would've taken the Prison and if I pass them the Cage here they should settle into white. That will give me a good shot at my colours in pack two.

Third-pick playables: Kami of the Hunt, Scuttling Death, Earthshaker, Hana Kami.



The Scuttling Death looked very nice until I got to the uncommons. Earthshaker is very powerful and I was definitely surprised to see it here as a third pick. A common and a rare were missing so there's no real way of guessing what was taken over it. The Earthshaker is the best card in this pack, and although the Scuttling Death is the on-colour pick, I've noted that there have been no playable blue cards in this pack or the previous one so I'm wondering if that colour is getting cut off. I go with the Earthshaker as it's great in blue-red or black-red and I'm still not sure which colours I'll be playing.

Fourth-pick playables: Cruel Deceiver, Waking Nightmare, Moss Kami, Pull Under.

I'm only on the fourth pick and the playables are very thin on the ground. These are some very weak packs. I don't really want to delve into a fourth colour by taking the Moss Kami, even though it is clearly the best card in the pack. The choice is basically between Cruel Deceiver and Pull Under. I'm not normally a fan of Pull Under as it's very expensive for what it does. I'll play it if I get it late, but I'd much rather make sure I get some decent two-drops for my deck as the second turn is very important in this format. I went with the Deceiver.

Fifth-pick playables: Blessed Breath, Serpent Skin, Hinder, Sokenzan Bruiser.

The Blessed Breath here really makes me wish I'd gone with the Ghostly Prison. With my neighbour on my left almost certainly in white, it's really too late to switch as I'd get cut off in pack two quite badly. I went with the Hinder. I'm not sure I'll play it, but it's a fine sideboard card against late-game Devouring Greeds and expensive bombs. If I'm short of playable cards for the deck, it's an acceptable main deck card.

Sixth-pick playables: Counsel of the Soratami, Indomitable Will, Soratami Cloudskater, Consuming Vortex.

Well, after the lack of blue spells in the first few packs here they come. This is good in that it shows that the initial packs were just lacking blue cards and it's unlikely the colour was being cut. Consuming Vortex is the best card here and it's a pick I'm happy with, as you always want a bounce spell or two in your blue decks (and this is the best one available).



Seventh-pick playables: Kodama's Reach, Soul of Magma, Kodama's Might, Soratami Mirror-Mage.

Having both Reach and Might go this late is unusual but there's probably only one or two green players on the table and they could've easily taken a different coloured card over these. Soul of Magma is fine in certain decks but the obvious pick here is the Mirror-Mage, which is a fine card for any blue deck.

Eighth-pick playables: Harsh Deceiver, Sift Through Sands, Kitsune Riftwalker.

There's nothing here I'd want to play main deck, and I took the Riftwalker as it's not a card I want to see played on turn three against my Deceiver and Akuba.

Ninth-pick playables: Dripping-Tongue Zubera, Devoted Retainer, Devouring Rage.

The original pack makes it back around and there's nothing here really. I took the Devouring Rage in case this deck somehow migrates into a deck with a number of spirits in it. I couldn't see that happening, though.

The remainder of the first pack was filled out with a Sokenzan Bruiser for the sideboard, a Cloudskater that made it around the table and a Quiet Purity and Cleanfall for potential splashed sideboard cards.

Pack One Summary

Incredibly weak packs overall. Blue was looking like it would definitely be played at this point with the Rainshaper, Mirror-Mage and Vortex being the highlights. The Hinder can make the main deck too. The second colour wasn't too clear. The Akuba and the Cruel Deceiver are easily out-weighted by the Earthshaker and there really wasn't anything playable beyond that.

Betrayers is a much weaker pack than *Champions* normally and I was quite worried about the lack of playable cards at this point. Things would probably have been better if I'd just taken the Prison for my first pick as the playables might look like: Ghostly Prison, Cage of Hands, Scuttling Death, Cruel Deceiver, Blessed Breath, Indomitable Will, with Devoted Retainer and Kitsune Riftwalker in the pool too. Still, there's little point dwelling on what might have been just yet, there were still two more packs to go but I was definitely going to need some favourable packs from here.



Pack Two



Well, not really what I was hoping for. Night of Soul's Betrayal is good card for certain decks but not in a deck with a bunch of 2/1 flyers. There wasn't a single removal spell in the pack and no great creatures either. At least the pack is weak overall. I took the Rainshaper and it's probably the best card in the pack.

Second-pick playables: Devouring Greed, Sosuke, Son of Seshiro, Glacial Ray, Honden of Cleansing Fire.

Oh dear, that first pick from pack one was looking brutal now. The rare is missing so it could just been have been a rare-grab but I was definitely surprised to see the Honden here. It's a little too late to switch, but even if that were a consideration, I wouldn't want the Honden anyway as there's a very nice Glacial Ray that almost immediately solidified my plan to go blue-red. The Devouring Greed was never really considered as it's unlikely that there will be many Spirits among the blue cards which will

definitely be in the deck. I also noted there was a Reach Through Mists in this pack and I hoped it would make it back around as a tenth pick.

Third-pick playables: Mystic Restraints, Ember-Fist Zubera, Soratami Seer.

No playable black cards here but that was okay as I was happy to stay in blue-red. This choice was particularly tough. All these cards are pretty mediocre but they'd all likely make the main deck if drafted. At this point I took a quick look through the cards I had. With the loss of the Cruel Deceiver and Wicked Akuba, there were now zero two-drops in the deck so I think I wanted the Zubera ahead of the other two spells simply for mana-curve issues. Restraint is okay but I don't really like playing it. In retrospect, I think I was too focused on the curve here and I should've gone with the Restraints.

Fourth-pick playables: Hearth Kami, Soratami Cloudskater, Soul of Magma, Kami of Ancient Law, Frostwielder.

Wow. After nothing in the first few packs there were actually several playable on-colour cards here. This pick was a pretty obvious one. It made me a little happier about the Zubera pick in the last pack as I scooped up the Frostwielder here and didn't feel too bad about passing the two-drop Hearth Kami.

Fifth-pick playables: Hearth Kami, Reach Through Mists, Villainous Ogre, Order of the Sacred Bell.

A seventh-pick Order was a nice gift for some green player -- I don't think the player to my immediate right is green after the Moss Kami in pick four from the first pack and the Kodama's Reach and Might in pick seven. For my deck, though, there wasn't much to choose from here. The Hearth Kami is an acceptable two-drop and once again I crossed my fingers that the Reach will make it around the table, but it was a weak pack so I'm wasn't holding my breath.

Sixth-pick playables: Sokenzan Bruiser, Serpent Skin, Petals of Insight, Samurai Enforcers, Mindblaze.

A nice late pick here in the Petals. It's a great card in this deck as it has nice interactions with both Glacial Ray and Earthshaker, potentially allowing a lot of abuse of those two cards. Drawing three cards isn't too bad either, should I want to do that.

Seventh-pick playables: Eye of Nowhere, Peer Through Depths, Mystic Restraints, Orbweaver Kumo.

Another pack with multiple cards that would probably have made my main deck. Restraints is the best card here by far and getting this late made me happier about passing up on it previously. The Eye would've been an acceptable main deck card as it's a cheap bounce spell and a good Splice vehicle for the Ray and the Vortex, but the Restraints is just better.

Eighth-pick playables: Hundred-Talon Kami, Cloudcrest Lake, Kami of the Hunt, Quiet Purity.



I could have hate-drafted the Hundred-Talon here as it's a good blocker for my flyers. I did have the Cleanfall and Purity that I might've wanted to sideboard in however, so I think the Cloudcrest Lake was a better choice to aid that possible sideboard splash. There's also the chance I might draft a white card or two from *Betrayers* that I wanted to add to the deck as a splash; having the Lake made that a lot easier.

Ninth-pick playables: Dampen Thought, Villainous Ogre, Thoughtbind, Psychic Puppetry.

The dregs from the pack I opened made it back round. I wouldn't play either of these blue cards main-deck and so I just took the Villainous Ogre away from the player to my right, whom I suspect might be drafting black.

The last few picks didn't include much of note. The Reach Through Mists did indeed make it around the table from pack two. I also snagged a late Eye of Nowhere that made it around.

Pack Two Summary

Going into this pack, the playable cards looked like this:

1CC: Reach Through Mists

2CC: Ember-Fist Zuberu, Soratami Cloudskater, Hearth Kami, Consuming Vortex, Glacial Ray, Eye of Nowhere

3CC: Soratami Rainshaper x 2, Hinder

4CC: Frostwielder, Soratami Mirror-Mage, Mystic Restraints

5CC: Petals of Insight

6CC: Earthshaker

That's only 14 playables, so some of the cards such as Thoughtbind might make the cut unless *Betrayers* is kind. The deck is okay but definitely not great. It's very light on removal so I'd really like to see Torrent of Stone in *Betrayers*. It also has a fairly high curve with several cards at four mana and above, so I would be thinking about favouring any cheaper cards I might see ahead of expensive ones.

Pack Three

Unfortunately I wasn't able to get a screen grab of the third pack in time, so I'll just list the playables as I did with the other packs.

First-pick playables: Okiba-Gang Shinobi, Split-Tail Miko, Blademane Baku, Mistblade Shinobi, Matsu-Tribe Sniper, Oyobi Who Split The Heavens.

Well, just as I was talking about potentially splashing a white card, look what got opened! The deck already had a minor Arcane theme with the Earthshaker and the various Arcane spells, so Oyobi was definitely worth taking here as a splash card. That splash is obviously helped by the Cloudcrest Lake I picked up at the end of pack two. The Sniper in this pack is pretty savage as it can kill half of the good creatures in my deck. I really hoped to see it lap so I can hate it when there's nothing left for me, but that doesn't usually happen. Without any great blue or red cards in the pack, taking Oyobi was an easy decision.

Second-pick playables: Split-Tail Miko, Frost Ogre, Mistblade Shinobi, Blinding Powder.

Once again, not the best of packs -- certainly no amazing gifts for my second pick. Frost Ogre is better than the Shinobi here for sure. The Shinobi is okay but it usually works as a conditional bounce spell as it's very hard to attack successfully with it for a second time. I had nothing that might help it

attack unheeded, so it's not a card I wanted to include in my deck -- especially as I already had a Vortex and the Eye. Frost Ogre would've been a fine addition here, but I've had a lot of good experience with Blinding Powder and I believe that was the better pick. My deck had a lot of vulnerable one-toughness creatures and the Powder lets them attack and block effectively. I took the Powder over the Frost Ogre.

Third-pick playables: Moonlit Strider, Ninja of the Deep Hours, Scourge of Numai.

Another weak pack. The two red cards in the pack were Shinka Gatekeeper and Crack the Earth. The Strider isn't worth splashing for, so I took the only card that might make the main deck -- the Ninja of the Deep Hours.

Fourth-pick playables: Ninja of the Deep Hours, Moonlit Strider, Veil of Secrecy, Overblaze, Lifespinner.

The same bunch of commons here as in the last pack, with both the Strider and the Ninja together. Once again there's not too much here for my deck, but at the same time I wasn't passing anything particularly ridiculous either. The Ninja is the best card and I took it although I wasn't particularly happy about it (as it's not a great card for blue-red).



Fifth-pick playables: Frost Ogre, Frostling, First Volley, Floodbringer.

Okay, could I not just give back the two Ninjas and keep all the red cards from this pack? This pick is actually fairly tough. Frostling and Frost Ogre are fairly close but this deck doesn't turn out to have a lot of fat in it, and the Ogre can happily trade with most commons. The deciding factor in this decision was the two Ninjas from the previous pack. It's looking like they'd make the main deck, and if they did it would really help to have a solid turn-one play so I could Ninjutsu out the Ninjas on the second turn. With that in mind, I took the Frostling.

Sixth-pick playables: Blademane Baku, Quillmane Baku, Takenuma Bleeder, Minamo's Meddling.

From a nice pack to a terrible one. It doesn't really matter what gets taken here as none of the cards would make the main deck. I decided to go with the Blademane Baku as it's the only card that might make the main deck if I found myself wishing for another two-drop to fill the curve.

Seventh-pick playables: Goblin Cohort, Ire of Kaminari, Phantom Wings, Disrupting Shoal.

Finally another pack with an actual decision to be made. Ire of Kaminari had to be immediately dismissed as I didn't have enough Arcane cards to support it. You need 10-plus and I didn't have anything close to that. I also dismissed Disrupting Shoal from the possible picks as I already had a Hinder, which is a much more efficient counterspell. The choice here was between Phantom Wings and Goblin Cohort. As I have no reason to lie, I went with the Goblin Cohort. Writing this up after the fact, I have no idea why. I think I was focused too much on the possibilities of turn-one Cohort/turn-two Hearth Kami/turn-three Rainshaper starts and figured I might get some nice aggressive draws with him. The Wings is a better pick here because the two Ninja of the Deep Hours are almost certainly going to make the deck, and assuming they do the Wings would've made a fine inclusion. The Wings is almost certainly a better pick -- drafting the Cohort here was a big mistake.



Eight-pick playables: Shinka Gatekeeper, Frostling, Toils of Night and Day.

An actual decent card comes round fairly late in the end. The Frostling was an automatic inclusion in the deck due to its interaction with the two Ninja as I already mentioned.

Ninth-pick playables: Mistblade Shinobi, Veil of Secrecy, Walker of Secret Ways.

Getting down to the weak cards now. I drafted the Mistblade, but with no way of making it unblockable and no way to send it to the air (Phantom Wings anyone...?), it wasn't really playable.

The draft wound down with me taking a Minamo's Meddling and then Kitsune Palliator, Heart of Light and two Mending Hands from the last few packs. I guess no one wanted to prevent any damage during this draft.

The Card Pool

The final card pool I'm left to work with looks like this:



It's obvious at this point that the deck would be mostly blue and red, with a potential white splash. Here's a more focused list of the cards in those colours:

Blue:
Floodbringer

Red:
Frostling x 2

White:
Oyobi Who Split The Heavens

Soratami Cloudskater
Soratami Rainshaper x 2
Mistblade Shinobi
Ninja of the Deep Hours x 2
Soratami Mirror-Mage
Reach Through Mists
Eye of Nowhere
Consuming Vortex
Hinder
Minamo's Meddling
Mystic Restraints
Petals of Insight

Goblin Cohort
Blademane Baku
Ember-Fist Zubera
Hearth Kami
Frostwielder
Sokenzan Bruiser
Earthshaker
Glacial Ray
Devouring Rage

Land:
Cloudcrest Lake

Artifact:
Blinding Powder

Even with a lot of very marginal cards, there were only 27 cards in that pool so there wouldn't be too many that get cut.

The first to go was Thoughtbind. Three-mana counterspells aren't too hot, especially when they don't counter some of your opponent's best spells. Not a good card for the main deck.

Next up is Devouring Rage. Although the late run on Frostlings gave the deck a few spirits, the overall count is pretty low with half a dozen spirits at best. I quite like Rage in a deck with flyers because it can be a great finisher but it's not playable here. I also cut the Floodbringer as there were better two-drops in the deck (including the similar-but-better Cloudskater).

I also moved the Sokenzan Bruiser to the sideboard -- at this point it's not a card I like to run maindeck. This was a fairly tough call because, as sad as it may be, this deck might actually benefit from a 3/3 body in it.

The deck was down to 23 cards but I thought I wanted to run 18 lands (there are plenty of cards that can benefit from the extra mana) and hopefully some of the card drawing from the Ninja or the Petals would make up for the lower spell count. This deck wanted to hit four mana every game and wanted to get a lot more if it's going to be able to take advantage of the Earthshaker, Oyobi and Petals+Ray combo should any of those be drawn. With one more card to cut, I finally settled on the Hinder. It's a reactive three-mana spell and a lot of the cards in this deck were fairly expensive anyway, so I didn't feel like I'd be able

The final deck looked like this:



Blue:

- Soratami Cloudskater
- Soratami Rainshaper x 2
- Ninja of the Deep Hours x 2
- Soratami Mirror-Mage
- Reach Through Mists
- Eye of Nowhere
- Consuming Vortex
- Mystic Restraints
- Petals of Insight

Red:

- Frostling x 2
- Goblin Cohort
- Ember-Fist Zubera
- Blademane Baku
- Hearth Kami
- Frostwielder
- Earthshaker
- Glacial Ray

White:

- Oyobi Who Split The Heavens

Land:

- Cloudcrest Lake
- Plains
- Mountain x 9
- Island x 7

Artifact:

- Blinding Powder

It's a pretty weak deck, as decks go. Other than take the Ghostly Prison with my first pick, I don't think there was much that could be done about that and it's not like a lot of amazing white cards were missed. A Honden, a Cage of Hands, a Split-Tail Miko and some Moonlit Striders are about all the quality white amounted to. That's better than what we're left with here, but there would still be a second colour to find too and it didn't seem like any of the colours had an abundance of powerful cards being passed around.

I had intended to write a little bit about the games and how the deck fared but they turned out to be very anti-climatic. I drew 12 lands and 7 spells in game one, and 13 lands and 6 spells in game two whilst getting beaten up by multiple Midnight Covenant-enchanted creatures. The second game was almost close when a Glacial Ray + Eye of Nowhere combo dealt with two Midnight Covenants and one creature but then my opponent dropped the Green Myojin and that was pretty much the end of that.

If you have any comments on this type of article, please do include them on the message boards. Even if you didn't like it I'd like to know why, and whether you think there are any changes that could be made to improve it to the point where you would like it. More/less information? More/less about the draft picks or the deckbuilding? Let me know.



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