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Barrels are funny. It's a comedy fact. Has there ever been a barrel that wasn't humorous in some way? The *least* funny example I can think of is going over Niagara Falls in a barrel, and that's *hysterical!* When the rich guy in a cartoon becomes suddenly destitute, he's pictured wearing a barrel. Something simple is described as being easier than shooting fish in a barrel, a mental image that's bizarre to say the least. And then there are the on-point examples: Something absurdly amusing is a barrel of laughs, or, even better, is more fun than a barrel of monkeys. To top things off, I've got to mention the funniest line of all time, delivered by Dave Eckelberry: "That dress makes you look like a barrel." (I guess that loses a little something out of context.)

Get ready for the cavalcade of laughs to continue with today's *Saviors of Kamigawa* preview card.



## Clean Sweep

What's Sokenzan? That's the mountain range in Kamigawa. Each of the oddball "cycle" of sweep cards has the same naming convention; all will become clear when the rest of them are released.

What's an oddball "cycle"? There are more cards with sweep, obviously. But there aren't one per color. Some colors have none, some have one, and some have two.

What's sweep? It's a mechanic that has you return any number of basic lands of a specified type to your hand as part of the spell's resolution. The number of lands you bounce determines the magnitude of the spell. Bounce a lot for a big spell, bounce a few for a little spell. You determine the number of lands to return—and actually return them—when the spell resolves, so if Barrel Down Sokenzan is countered, or you realize damaging the creature is useless (perhaps it regenerated in response), then you return no Mountains and you haven't hurt your board position.

## Sweep Under the Rug

As a burn spell, Barrel Down Sokenzan is functional and versatile, but not spectacular. It only hits creatures, so that limits its usefulness right there. For 2R, you typically get to deal 3 damage, plus have the option of hitting players, plus get an extra benefit (see Carbonize, Yamabushi's Flame, and Urza's Rage). In this case, you have to bounce two Mountains to gain a comparable effect, which sets you back a little (but not too much) in your board development. Of course, the variable damage amount sets it apart from these fixed-number spells; Barrel Down Sokenzan can burn out creatures that Yamabushi's Flame barely sings.

Blaze and its ilk are next in line for comparison. The amount of damage Blaze deals is also related to the number of lands you have, but the differences between these spells are so great that they're hardly in the same ballpark. Blaze makes you tap lands, not bounce them. Blaze keys off of any lands (not just Mountains), as well as other mana sources. Blaze lets you hit players. Barrel Down Sokenzan has a fixed (and low) mana cost, meaning you can play other spells on the same turn that you throw a huge Barrel. It deals damage equal to *double* the number of bounced Mountains. No, they seem similar on the surface (number of lands translates to amount of damage), but they don't mesh.

The closest card to Barrel Down Sokenzan is Spitting Earth. Spitting Earth also only hits creatures, and it also cares only about Mountains. It's one mana cheaper and it's not Arcane, but the main difference is that it leaves the Mountains on the table in exchange for dealing half of Barrel Down Sokenzan's maximum damage. Both are good, with each one being better in different situations.

So there you have it. Barrel Down Sokenzan is a playable but mediocre Limited card. The end.

Right?

*Wrong.*

Oh, so very, very wrong.

In any other set, that might be right, but in *Saviors of Kamigawa*, this card does much, much more.

## Winning the Sweepstakes

And that's why this card had to be my Week 2 preview card—it needs to be defined in terms of the themes of the set. To recap the cards that have been previewed on this website over the past few days:

**Kagemaro, First to Suffer:** A ridiculous powerhouse... that wants your hand to be full of cards.

**Okina Nightwatch:** A 5-mana 7/6 creature... as long as your hand is full of cards.

**Sasaya, Orochi Ascendant:** A creature that flips into a mind-boggling mana producer... if your hand is full of lands.

**Thoughts of Ruin:** It's a 4-mana Armageddon (which hasn't been seen since, uh, Armageddon)... if your hand is full of cards.

The shocking truth: *Sweep is not a cost. It's a benefit.*

*Saviors of Kamigawa* has a pervasive (and powerful, and fun, and intensely interesting in terms of game-play dynamics) theme running through it whereby hand size matters. All I can talk about here are the last four preview cards, and look at what's on display there—just imagine if I could reference the entire set! Some *Saviors* cards need seven or more cards in your hand to work at maximum efficiency. Some cards only care that your hand is the biggest one in the game. Some cards are variable based on the number of cards you've got. It'll change the way you play and create compelling decisions that you've never had to think about before.

But, when you think about it, the whole theme kinda favors (of course) blue. Blue has all the best card-drawing spells. Blue likes to sit around playing Draw-Go with a fat hand. Blue has been stockpiling Moonfolk all block, which let you quickly bounce your lands to bulk up your hand. So, once again, blue is the best color at enabling the main theme of a set... or is it?

Part of the "hand-size matters" theme is seeding all the other colors with creative (and color-appropriate) enablers. They're scattered throughout the set, and many of them are so clever you won't even realize how much they help this theme at first glance. This is the true purpose of Barrel Down Sokenzan. Red isn't going to get a sudden influx of card-drawing cards; that's not its style. But Barrel Down Sokenzan can let you go from holding 3 cards to holding 8 cards at instant speed while frying the biggest threat on the table.

## **A Series Sweep**

Of course, I'm very limited in what "hand-size matters" cards I can talk about. Luckily, the four that have been revealed so far are all insane.

Boosting Kagemaro's size has obvious game-conquering consequences.

It's hard to keep a poker face when you're attacking with a small Okina Nightwatch while holding Barrel Down Sokenzan. Your opponent should expect a trick and may gang up on the Nightwatch with enough creatures to deal 6 damage to it, but when you burn out a blocker *and* supersize your attacker, you may have just put your opponent in a hole too deep to climb out of.

Sweep cards are perfect for flipping Sasaya (and are even better than blue's card-drawing spells) because you specifically want *lands* in your hand. After Sasaya's Essence is in play, you'll have to rebuild your mana base—but its ultra-Mana Flare ability will help you get your mana generation capabilities back to normal very fast, and micromanaging how many Mountains you have in play can help you avoid serious mana burn.

The most ridiculous interaction may be with Thoughts of Ruin. Put Thoughts of Ruin on the stack, then respond to it by playing Barrel Down Sokenzan and picking up all your Mountains. When Thoughts of Ruin resolves, your hand will be quite full. You remove your opponent's biggest threat from the board and destroy all his lands, while meanwhile you have a grip full of lands to speed your recovery. (Alternately, you could play Barrel Down Sokenzan first, float some mana, pick up all your Mountains, then play Thoughts of Ruin. If you replay a Mountain in between playing these spells, this only requires having 4RR available at the start of the turn.)

The most obvious non-*Saviors of Kamigawa* card to combo with Barrel Down Sokenzan is Seismic Assault. Pick up all your lands, then pitch them at your opponent's head. It's similar to the Seismic Assault-Trade Routes deck, except you can stick to mono-red.

## **Nearly Out of Sweep Phrases**

Combining those last two ideas into the same deck seems like a good plan to me, so here it is.  
Caution: hot plate.

Avalanche!

## Future Standard burn deck

And here's an early take on a Sasaya deck. I know there are other *Savior* cards that would fit in here, but I can't do much more with them than tease you that they exist. Sasaya gets along very well with Moonfolk, but I didn't want to water down the mana base with Islands.

To the Ground

## Future Online Extended Sasaya deck

### OK, One More: Chimney Sweep

Once you're done reading a column on this website, if you're looking for more content about the same subject, head immediately to the message boards by clicking the "Discuss" link at the bottom of the page. I read the message board spawned by this column every week, and it's fascinating. Last week, I even learned some new things there. What did I find?

—A marriage proposal... from a 34-year-old guy named Pierre. Dang. It's not the least bit surprising; in the category of professions of undying love I've received from my readers, that brings the score to Men 56, Women 0. Since, *obviously*, the only reason I started writing a **Magic** column was to meet women, I'm starting to wonder if there was a flaw in my strategy somewhere.

—My second deck last week doesn't work as well as I thought. Oops. I had suggested pairing Measure of Wickedness with sacrificing token creatures. Tokens *do* go to the graveyard, so I thought this would trigger the enchantment's self-donate effect. However, the trigger doesn't look for *creatures* going to the graveyard—it looks for *cards* going to the graveyard, and tokens aren't cards. The deck is still neat... just don't add any Measure of Wickednesses to it.

—There's an amazingly cool way to abuse Measure of Wickedness I never thought of: *Force your opponent to give it back to you.* The donate ability is mandatory, so if you cause one of your opponent's cards to go to his graveyard while he controls Measure of Wickedness, he *must* give you the enchantment. Here's the plan: It's the end of your opponent's turn. Measure of Wickedness's sacrifice ability triggers and goes on the stack. In response, you Shock one of his creatures, which goes to the graveyard. Now Measure of Wickedness's donate ability triggers and goes on the stack. That resolves first, so your opponent must



give you control of the enchantment. Then the sacrifice ability resolves. Your opponent can't sacrifice Measure of Wickedness because he doesn't control it. But he can lose 8 life, *so he does*—and Measure of Wickedness *is still in play*. Pull that off twice more and you'll win the game with just a single copy of the enchantment.

## That Last Header Was Kind of a Non Sequitur

I know a number of people are curious about my opinion of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* movie, so here it is: *It made me happy*. Is it perfect? By no means—the plot's kind of muddled, and anyone can nitpick about their own favorite bits that were left out... but why? I walked out of the theater deeply contented. I thought the movie did right by both the characters and the philosophy (the mundane is absurd and vice versa), I was very pleased with the acting (especially Alan Rickman), and I laughed all the way through it. They got a lot of things right: For example, they never *explained* how useful a towel is, they *showed* us instead. Count the number of different ways Ford uses his throughout the film! So, as an avid fan of towels, I recommend it.

But read the books first.

## Sweeping Up

It's my duty here to plug the *Saviors of Kamigawa* Prerelease this upcoming weekend—but I wouldn't actually endorse it unless I liked it. Back when I was allowed to play in them, they were my favorite **Magic** events outside of Reject Rare Drafts. Everyone's on kinda equal footing, there's a palpable sense of communal excitement about the new cards, and it's the most casual-friendly tournament out there. If you've been to a Prerelease before, you're probably going to this one. If you haven't been to one before, check it out this weekend. It's a lot of fun.

Until next week, have fun at the Prerelease!

Mark

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