

Scott Wills

Tuesday, May 24, 2005

As I write this article the **Magic** Invitational is taking place and the *Saviours of Kamigawa* pre-release is just a few days away. Unfortunately that means no *Saviours* coverage here today. Given that, I thought I'd take this opportunity to take one last look at a *Champions* draft as there's still plenty we can learn about how a deck progresses and is built through-out a draft, regardless of the sets that are used.

Just as before, it's a *Champion-Champions-Betrayers* booster draft from **Magic Online's** 8-4 Queue. After the last draft walkthrough article I did I had quite a few players ask me to list all of the picks from each pack so they could see all of the cards I was dismissing. This obviously isn't an unreasonable request so I've added all of them now. If you just want to see which pick I made from each pack that's the one high-lighted in Bold text. The down side is that this article ends up being a lot longer and I'm not sure how much of an issue that is with all of you, so please take a moment at the end to drop into the forums and let me know what you think of this format.

Okay – on with the draft!

Pack 1 - Pick 1



Kitsune Healer, Yamabushi's Storm, Sift Through Sands, Kashi-Tribe Warriors, Waking Nightmare, Harsh Deceiver, Midnight Covenant, Terashi's Cry, Unnatural Speed, Yamabushi's Flame, Soratami Mirror-Guard, **Hideous Laughter**, Kami of the Palace Fields, Jade Idol, Okina, Temple to the Grandfathers.

The first pick of any draft can sometimes be the easiest and sometimes the hardest. If you open a bomb you then just have to spend a few moments figuring out what colours the players downwind of you will draft from the pack (and which significant cards may come back around) before taking the bomb and passing the pack on. This pack is a little trickier than that as there are three cards that immediately leap out at me: Yamabushi's Flame, Soratami Mirror-Guard and Hideous Laughter. As good as the Mirror-Guard is it's not up to the quality of the two removal spells and so that's the first to get dismissed. The choice between Flame and Laughter is actually fairly close. If you end up playing a red-black aggro deck for example, you might not even want Laughter in your deck but you're always going to be playing the Flame. The Flame is also splashable so it also makes a little more sense as first pick.

However, I think the potential for the Laughter is greater – Flame is never going to swing a game around as dramatically as Laughter can if your opponent drops guys on turns 1-3 and then you sweep his board. My choice is therefore Hideous Laughter. I'm pretty sure the guy on my left will take the

Flame and the next player hopefully Mirror-Guard which is fine with me as it helps me formulate my plan which I'll talk about during the next pick.

Pack 1 - Pick 2

Thoughtbind, **Sakura-Tribe Elder**, Wicked Akuba, Indomitable Will, Brutal Deceiver, Hisoka's Guard, Jukai Messenger, Midnight Covenant, Ethereal Haze, Pull Under, Waterveil Cavern, Horizon Seed, Konda's Hatamoto, Zo-Zu the Punisher.

Looking at this pack the choice might seem fairly obvious, as there's a decent on-colour two-drop that should probably get taken over the expensive six-mana removal spell. If you don't need to delve into a second colour right away then why should you?

I've talked previously about having a plan for your draft. While I had no plan when I sat down, as soon as I selected that Hideous Laughter you better believe I began to formulate one. Laughter is much better when paired with green or white than it is with blue or red. Green and white have numerous high toughness creatures that survive the -2/-2 effect and Laughter becomes much more playable in those decks as a result. In red-black you lead out with something like Hearth Kami and Takenuma Bleeder and then your opponent makes a River Kaijin and you look at the Laughter in your hand and notice that it basically does nothing. Trading your Hearth Kami and the Laughter for a three mana 1/4 is not what you want to be doing. In green black however you lead out with Sakura-Tribe Elder, Gnarled Mass and Order of the Sacred Bell against an opponent's Nezumi Cutthroat and Soratami Rainshaper and then cackle maniacally when you sweep their board and leave your own completely intact. These are extreme examples I grant you, but they illustrate my point. The fact that the best two cards I passed from pack one were Yamabushi's Flame and Soratami Mirror-Guard help reinforce the choice as it's less likely those players will be drafting green or white.

With that in mind my plan is already to lean towards either green-black or white-black in this draft and we have the best green two-drop in the set in this pack. The Elder also helps out with any subsequent splashes should any off-colour cards come along that I want to use. It's probably better in sheer power terms than the Akuba too and so that's my pick from this pack. There's a little risk the player to my left will take the Akuba and go black but I think Zo-Zu could be a better pick for them if they took the Flame, and as I have no idea what their first pick is there's no real way to determine which they'll take at this point.

Pack 1 - Pick 3

Waking Nightmare, Devoted Retainer, Devouring Rage, Callous Deceiver, Orochi Ranger, Kami of the Waning Moon, Psychic Puppetry, Joyous Respite, Ashen-Skin Zubera, **Kitsune Blademaster**, Student of Elements, Reciprocate, Shimatsu the Bloodcloaked.

Well the green-black plan definitely gets put on hold, at least for one pack. Both of the good cards in this pack are white so now I'm thinking about white-black as the deck to draft. Although Reciprocate is removal, and it's cheap, it's also dependant on the creature you want to remove attacking you and you being able to afford to take the damage. I prefer Blademaster and that's the card I went for.

Pack 1 - Pick 4

Sokenzan Bruiser, Hisoka's Guard, Serpent Skin, Hundred-Talon Kami, Brutal Deceiver, Akki Rockspeaker, Psychic Puppetry, Orochi Leafcaller, Orbweaver Kumo, **Honden of Seeing Winds**, Cloudcrest Lake, Budoka Gardener.

A fourth pick blue Honden in pack one is a little unusual. Taking it would mean drafting four different coloured cards in the first four picks but there isn't really another card in the pack I want. Hundred-

Talon Kami is nice but it's nowhere near as good as the Honden. Taking the Honden gives me a third plan – a multi-colour green deck – that might be the way to go if any more Hondens are drafted. Having three separate plans after the fourth pick isn't necessarily a bad thing, especially when so many of the cards from each plan overlap. I would also state that even at this point I haven't ruled anything out – if this deck ended up blue-white I wouldn't be surprised. I'm really not passing anything significant here either although with the Hundred-Talon shipping to my left one of the next two players will almost surely take that. There's not too much I can do about though and as the Honden is the best pick I go for it.

Pack 1 - Pick 5

Counsel of the Soratami, Scuttling Death, Blessed Breath, Hearth Kami, Soratami Cloudskater, Orochi Leafcaller, Ragged Veins, Terashi's Cry, Pull Under, **Honden of Night's Reach**, Night Dealings.

Speaking of additional Hondens... It should be clear here that the choice is between Scuttling Death and Honden of Nights' Reach. If I didn't already have the blue Honden then this would be a no-brainer but with it things get a lot trickier. Ole Scuttles will probably go in any deck I wind up drafting as having both him and the Honden present for my fifth pick means black isn't being over-drafted to my right and I'm probably ok to be in it. The black Honden isn't great by itself but in combination with the blue one it's plenty powerful enough. Drawing three cards a turn while your opponent never has a hand will easily win 99% of games. The Scuttling Death fits better in the green-black Spirit/Soulshift deck but I haven't even drafted a Spirit yet. As this is only pick 5 of the first pack there's every chance I could end up with a third Honden so I decide to go with that. I wouldn't disagree with anyone who wanted to take Scuttles here though, it's probably the safer pick.

Pack 1 - Pick 6

Scuttling Death, Indomitable Will, Uncontrollable Anger, Soratami Cloudskater, Humble Budoka, Pious Kitsune, Desperate Ritual, Lifted by Clouds, Kitsune Riftwalker, Guardian of Solitude.

A very easy pick this time around and it makes me feel a little better about passing the last Scuttling Death. It's nice that I'm passing nothing playable in black or green in this pack, hopefully solidifying my position in those colours.

Pack 1 - Pick 7

Commune with Nature, Devoted Retainer, Yamabushi's Storm, Eye of Nowhere, **Venerable Kumo**, Ethereal Haze, Akki Rockspeaker, Field of Reality, Nezumi Bone-Reader.

A fairly weak pack here but I'll scoop up the Kumo as some flying defence and another Soulshift guy for a potential Spirit theme.

Pack 1 - Pick 8



Stone Rain, Sift Through Sands, Vine Kami, Lantern Kami, Lava Spike, Lifted by Clouds, **Lantern-Lit Graveyard**, Thousand-legged Kami.

Vine Kami and Thousand-legged Kami are the two on-colour picks but I don't really ever want to be in a position where I have to play them in my deck. I'd rather avoid seven mana creatures altogether but if I do play one it has to be much better than a 4/4 with few abilities to speak of. As I'm basically certain at this point that I'm going to be playing black I take the Lantern-Lit Graveyard to help with any potential red splashes I might end up wanting.

Pack 1 - Pick 9

Kitsune Healer, Sift Through Sands, Kashi-Tribe Warriors, Midnight Covenant, Terashi's Cry, Unnatural Speed, **Kami of the Palace Fields**.

The original pack comes back around, completely devoid of anything really playable. I take the flyer as there's still a chance I might have to go into black-white or green-black-white and he could potentially Soulshift back the Scuttling Death.

Pack 1 - Pick 10

Thoughtbind, Hisoka's Guard, Jukai Messenger, Midnight Covenant, **Ethereal Haze**, Horizon Seed.

No good late picks to be found here. I'd never consider boarding Jukai Messenger in the green mirror and so I just take the Haze to further cut off white in case I want it.

Last few picks:

Student of Elements over Devoted Retainer, Devouring Rage, Psychic Puppetry, Joyous Respite

Orochi Leafcaller over Hisoka's Guard, Akki Rockspeaker, Psychic Puppetry

Counsel of the Soratami over Ragged Veins, Terashi's Cry

Lifted by Clouds over Pious Kitsune

Field of Reality

So after the first pack the playable cards look like this:

1CC: Orochi Leafcaller

2CC: Sakura-Tribe Elder

3CC: Kitsune Blademaster, Counsel of the Soratami

4CC: Hideous Laughter, Honden of Night's Reach

5CC: Venerable Kumo, Scuttling Death, Honden of Seeing Winds

6CC: Kami of the Palace Fields

Well there's some blue cards, some black ones, some white ones and some green ones! At this point I'll keep those white cards in the back of my mind but I'm mentally cutting that colour from contention. There's only basically a Blademaster worth getting excited about. At this point in time I'm still thinking about some sort of green-black deck, possibly splashing blue for the second Honden. Although there isn't much green here yet it's still the best colour to pair with the black cards and I didn't pass anything amazing in it pack one so I'm optimistic that I'll get hooked up in pack two. If another Honden comes around early I'll definitely be picking it and playing it as long as the mana-base can survive the two off-colour card splash.

On to the second pack.

Pack 2 - Pick 1



Orochi Ranger, Devouring Greed, Call to Glory, Devouring Rage, River Kaijin, Venerable Kumo, Vigilance, Desperate Ritual, Wandering Ones, Nezumi Cutthroat, Mothrider Samurai, **Thief of Hope**, Brothers Yamazaki, Cut the Tethers, Kuro Pitlord

Although I only have the two Spirits I want to play so far, and expensive ones at that, the Devouring Greed is still very tempting. Should it be taken over Thief of Hope? Probably not, although I would consider doing so if I already had a three-drop or two and a lot of Spirits. The Thief is powerful but it's not the game-ender Greed often is. The Thief is much better in a deck with fewer Spirits and at this point in time I have no idea how spirit-heavy the deck will be. The Cutthroat is an option too but I think I prefer Thief in the decks I'm planning to draft and as such that's what I go with. It hurts to pass the Greed but there's still time to pick one up.

Pack 2 - Pick 2

Brutal Deceiver, Reach Through Mists, Kami of the Hunt, Gibbering Kami, Kabuto Moth, Soul of Magma, Akki Rockspeaker, Psychic Puppetry, Orochi Leafcaller, Soratami Rainshaper, Kodama's Reach, Struggle for Sanity, **Strength of Cedars**, Honor-Worn Shaku



This is the point in time where the draft is decided. Take Kabuto Moth and go with a white-black Spirit deck or take Strength of Cedars and try for a green-black deck. Both cards are obviously powerful, but I think Strength gets the nod in that score. Moth fits better into the Soulshift theme though. The bit that swings my decision here is the two Hondens. I'm still not sure I don't want to play them but if I go white it becomes a lot harder to splash the blue Hondens so that's another card lost from the pool. I'm also not convinced that I'll be getting passed good white cards – I

think it's much more likely that the green ones will come through this pack. It's a very close choice but I stick with the most flexible option and go with the Strength of Cedars.

Pack 2 - Pick 3

River Kaijin, Commune with Nature, Devouring Greed, Kitsune Healer, Stone Rain, Floating Dream Zubera, Jukai Messenger, Deathcurse Ogre, Silent-Chant Zubera, Feral Deceiver, **Befoul**, Eerie Procession, Painwracker Oni

I was very happy when I saw the Devouring Greed, until I noticed the Befoul too. Both those are better than the Painwracker Oni so the choice is down to these two. As much as I'd like the Greed in this deck the Befoul just has to be picked as the deck needs a targeted removal spell or two and with only Horobi's Whisper in *Betrayers* you really need to take every chance you get at one. Befoul isn't the best at four mana and Sorcery speed but it does do the job in most situations.

Pack 2 - Pick 4

Distress, Kami of the Painted Road, Soul of Magma, Hisoka's Defiance, Humble Budoka, Wicked Akuba, Peer Through Depths, Dripping-Tongue Zubera, Deathcurse Ogre, Konda's Hatamoto, **Dance of Shadows**, Hankyu

This pack makes me a lot happier about the last pick as Dance of Shadows is usually just as good a finisher as Greed is. If you've got a bunch of guys then Dance of Shadows will usually deal at least as much damage as a Greed would, and sometimes even more in a green deck. Even colours with a black component don't usually have too many black creatures back on defence. With Akuba, Distress, Zubera and Budoka in this pack there's a decent chance of getting a playable card as my 12th pick too.

Pack 2 - Pick 5

Kabuto Moth, Hearth Kami, Reach Through Mists, Villainous Ogre, Kitsune Diviner, **Soulless Revival**, Silent-Chant Zubera, Ember-Fist Zubera, Kumano's Pupils, Petals of Insight, Samurai Enforcers.

Fifth pick Moth! Maybe black-white was the better plan after all. I have no idea what cards the last four players must've taken, especially as none of them have drafted an uncommon. With only the Blademaster as my other playable white card I don't really want to have to splash for a couple of three-drops and doing so would permanently kill any plans to use the Hondens. I still might not use them as it doesn't look like a third will be forthcoming but it's still possible. If you dismiss the Moth the choice then comes down to Villainous Ogre or Soulless Revival. As this deck will hopefully plan to win via Soulshift and it's solid creatures I think the Revival is a better pick for the deck. Ogre is a mediocre three-drop and I think that its place will be better filled by the Gnarled Masses and Takenuma Bleeders available in *Betrayers*.

Pack 2 - Pick 6

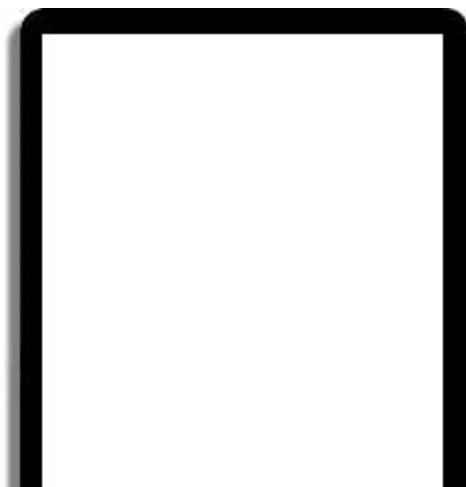
Villainous Ogre, Uncontrollable Anger, Thoughtbind, **Burr Grafter**, Cursed Ronin, Wandering Ones, Wear Away, Ragged Veins, Mana Seism, Time of Need

Burr Grafter is a fine late pick here as it interacts very well Thief of Hope and Scuttling Death I've already drafted. No real decision to make here.

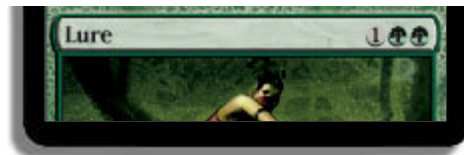
Pack 2 - Pick 7

Lava Spike, Kashi-Tribe Warriors, Lantern Kami, Unearthly Blizzard, Unnatural Speed, Kami of Twisted Reflection, Wear Away, **Sensei's Divining Top**, Lure

If there's going to be 'controversial' picks in this draft I think this one will be it. I personally just don't like Lure in this set. It's a good finisher sometimes but I already have Dance of Shadows for that. I can see that it could be good on a third turn Gnarled Mass when facing a Rainshaper but in general someone would have a two-drop they've had to hold back too, and you might just be sitting across from a Blademaster or Nezumi Ronin anyway. Basically, there are times when Lure is completely dead and I personally avoid cards like that when I can. I like finishers but cards like Devouring Greed and Dance of Shadows are far harder to disrupt than a Lure. I'm not a huge fan of the Top either but in this deck it can help smooth out mana draws for that third turn Gnarled Mass I'm hoping to



pick up and I already have one shuffler in the deck in the Sakura-Tribe Elder. I might not play it but I want the option of doing so.



Pack 2 - Pick 8

Kami of the Painted Road, Akki Avalanchers, Distress, Kitsune Diviner, **Ashen-Skin Zubera**, Quiet Purity, Crushing Pain, Gale Force.

Potentially strong, but too situational

Not too much to discuss here; the Zubera is another spirit and another two-drop which this deck is lacking at the moment. The Gale Force would make an excellent sideboard card but at this point I think I need to focus more on filling out the main deck.

Pack 2 - Pick 9

Call to Glory, Devouring Rage, River Kaijin, **Venerable Kumo**, Vigilance, Wandering Ones, Cut the Tethers

Another average creature gets added to the pile. It's not a terrible card though, especially with the Soulshift tacked on which this deck is happy to have more of.

Last few picks

Orochi Leafcaller over Brutal Deceiver, Reach Through Mists, Psychic Puppetry, Struggle for Sanity, Honor Worn Shaku.

Commune with Nature over Kitsune Healer, Stone Rain, Jukai Messenger, Deathcurse Ogre.

Dripping-Tongue Zubera over Distress, Peer Through Depths, Deathcurse Ogre.

Kitsune Diviner, over Kumano's Pupils, Samurai Enforcers

Thoughtbind, over Ragged Veins

Unnatural Speed

Not too bad for late picks there. The Zubera is welcome and the Commune with Nature interacts nicely with the Divining Top I picked up early.

After two packs are complete let's take a look at what the playable cards look like now:





1CC: Orochi Leafcaller x 2, Sensei's Divining Top, Commune with Nature

2CC: Sakura-Tribe Elder, Ashen-Skin Zubera, Dripping-Tongue Zubera

3CC: Thief of Hope

4CC: Burr Grafter, Hideous Laughter, Befoul, Honden of Night's Reach

5CC: Venerable Kumo x 2, Scuttling Death, Soulless Revival, Honden of Seeing Winds, Strength of Cedars, Dance of Shadows

It's still not great but it's shaping up okay. The top end of the curve is chockfull here but that's ok as I've intentionally avoided taking three-drops too highly due the presence of Gnarled Mass and Takenuma Bleeder in *Betrayers*. There's also Skullsnatcher (unfortunately not a spirit) and Child of Thorns to fill out the cheap creatures. I'd really like to see a Horobi's Whisper most of all. The decision about whether to run the Hondens is still to be decided as the deck is already full of spells at five mana. If the Gnarled Masses turn up then I'll be looking at 3 mana cards requiring   and four mana cards requiring   so the mana base might not support the addition of an off-colour land.

Let's crack on with the *Betrayers* booster.

Pack 3 - Pick 1



Torrent of Stone, Ninja of the Deep Hours, Child of Thorns, Skullsnatcher, Moonlit Strider, Frost Ogre, Heart of Light, Akki Blizzard-Herder, Veil of Secrecy, Vital Surge, Bile Urchin, Stream of Consciousness, **Pus Kami**, Terashi's Verdict, Blazing Shoal

Not the best of packs really. The choice basically comes down to Pus Kami or Torrent of Stone. That Lantern-Lit Graveyard I picked up early could come in very handy for casting the Torrent but it's never going to be spliced in this deck. I'm still at the point where I'd rather avoid splashing if I can and although I have declared my lack of love for 7 mana spells on more than one occasion the Pus Kami is actually fine. If you can untap with it in play you're almost certainly going to kill something good and get something else good back in return. If you're under no pressure it's very easy just to attack with it and keep a Swamp open for that potential 3-for-1 trade should they be forced to trade it off in combat. The Soulshift aspect of it is good in this deck too as it has the potential to chain all the way back down from Scuttling Death through Burr Grafter and Thief of Hope to the Zuberass.

Pack 3 - Pick 2

Shinka Gatekeeper, Shimmering Glasskite, Child of Thorns, Okiba-Gang Shinobi, Kami of Tattered Shoji, Kumano's Blessing, Toils of Night and Day, Matsu-Tribe Sniper, Bile Urchin, Heart of Light, **Hired Muscle**, Flames of the Blood Hand, Sowing Salt, Sway of the Stars.

Hopefully this pick doesn't need too much explanation. Although the Muscle might be tricky to cast on turn three it's still very easy to flip it when almost all of your spells and creatures trigger it. If you can flip it on turn 5 you can usually get a couple of smashes in with it simply as a 4/4 and after that its fear ability will soon finish the game. It's another good three-drop that this deck is lacking and it's the easy pick here.

Pack 3 - Pick 3

Ribbons of the Reikai, **Gnarled Mass**, Skullmane Baku, Waxmane Baku, Harbinger of Spring, Mending Hands, First Volley, Floodbringer, Call for Blood, Jetting Glasskite, Gods' Eye, Gate to the Reikai, Slumbering Tora.

Gotta love the third pick Dragon which is basically what Jetting Glasskite is. The only question is – can I play it? There are already two Leafcallers in the card-pool and one of those will obviously easily allow this to come out when six mana is reached. There's also the possibility of including two Islands to support this and the Honden. In making this decision though I have to look at the rest of the deck and I've already got some heavy mana requirements in terms of colour. The deck also has a lot going on at its top end as well and it's really crying out for the quality three-drop of Gnarled Mass that's also in the pack. In the end I think this deck will have enough power, and the extra power of the Glasskite will hurt the mana a little too much. The Gnarled Mass is the perfect three drop for this Soulshift heavy deck and its early damage will also significantly improve the power of the Dance of Shadows and Strength of Cedars as they can then be used as the finishers they're meant to be. For those reasons I unfortunately take the vanilla 3/3 over the six mana 4/4 flyer...!

Pack 3 - Pick 4

Kami of False Hope, Quillmane Baku, Scaled Hulk, **Takenuma Bleeder**, Hundred-Talon Strike, Akki Blizzard-Herder, Minamo's Meddling, Uproot, Stir the Grave, Silverstorm Samurai, Soratami Mindsweeper, Sowing Salt.

Scaled Hulk vs. Takenuma Bleeder is the choice here and again it comes down to mana curve issues. I'd be quite happy to run a Hulk in this deck but I don't want to take it over the large three drop. Once again the Bleeder will help deal early damage and thus increase the potency of the five mana finishers. I'd like to get a Hulk later but at this point in time the Bleeder is needed for the deck and that's the card I pick here.



Pack 3 - Pick 5

Horobi's Whisper, Moonlit Strider, Shinka Gatekeeper, Ninja of the Deep Hours, Scaled Hulk, Crack the Earth, Minamo's Meddling, Traproot Kami, Blessing of Leeches, Takeno's Cavalry, Soratami Mindsweeper.

Just as I'm about to give up hope finally a Horobi's Whisper shows up! Very surprising as a fifth pick but I'm obviously very happy to grab it.

Pack 3 - Pick 6

Psychic Spear, Traproot Kami, Harbinger of Spring, Mending Hands, Ire of Kaminari, Phantom Wings, **Petalmane Baku**, Crawling Filth, Quillmane Baku, Akki Raider.

Not too much going on here. The Petalmane Baku is a card I'd probably play in this deck as it can be cast on turn two and then function as a way of maybe casting the Pus Kami a little sooner than lands would otherwise allow as well as providing blue mana for the Honden of Seeing Winds. Psychic Spear would be nice to have but I think I'd want it in my sideboard initially and again, I think I want the main deck card here.

Pack 3 - Pick 7

Roar of Jukai, Okiba-Gang Shinobi, Takeno's Cavalry, Blessing of Leeches, Veil of Secrecy, Matsu-Tribe Sniper, Stir the Grave, Kaijin of the Vanishing Touch, **Loam Dweller**.

This is another really tough pick that I'm not that sure about. Roar of Jukai is a respectable combat trick and the fact that its Arcane might help splice Revival or Whisper in the mid-game. However I really like the fact there is a 2/2 Spirit two-drop here. With one of the two 3/3s hopefully coming down on the third turn it's quite possible an opponent could be forced into making some dangerous blocking decisions early in the game and the Roar punishes them for that. I think what swings it for me here though is the fact that I have no 2/2s for the second turn at all at this point and on top of that the Loam Dweller can potentially accelerate into fourth Turn Scuttling Death. Once again, with the Soulshift theme very apparent in this deck the benefit of another solid Spirit shouldn't be underrated. A tough one but I go with the 2/2 to fill out the creature count and improve the mana curve.

Pack 3 - Pick 8

Harbinger of Spring, Kami of Tattered Shoji, **Terashi's Grasp**, Crack the Earth, Floodbringer, Blessing of Leeches, Body of Jukai, Kitsune Palliator.

There's nothing too playable here and I'd rather have a Terashi's Grasp for a sideboard splash than any of the on colour cards.

Pack 3 - Pick 9

Skullsnatcher, Frost Ogre, Heart of Light, Akki Blizzard-Herder, Veil of Secrecy, Vital Surge, Stream of Consciousness.

A late two drop is quite welcome here although it's hardly exciting. Depending on how the final list looks, it might be preferable to play the other spirit two-drops over this guy for this particular deck but I'm happy to have that choice all the same.



Pack 3 - Pick 10

Shinka Gatekeeper, Kami of Tattered Shoji, Blessing of Leeches, Toils of Night and Day, **Heart of Light**, Sowing Salt.

The playable cards start to dry up and I just take the Heart of Light as its pretty good removal against my ground-based attackers.

Last few picks

Uproot over Ribbons of the Reikai, Mending Hands, Call for Blood, Gods' Eye, Gate to the Reikai.

Quillmane Baku over Akki Blizzard-Herder, Minamo's Meddling, Silverstorm Samurai.

Blessing of Leeches over Minamo's Meddling, Takeno's Cavalry.

Harbinger of Spring over Teardrop Kami.

Takeno's Cavalry.

Nothing to talk about there really. Call for Blood is terrible but Uproot would be the better pick as a potential sideboard card against Genjus.

So with the draft complete let's look at the card pool I have to work with:

1CC: Orochi Leafcaller x 2, Sensei's Divining Top, Commune with Nature

2CC: Sakura-Tribe Elder, Loam Dweller, Petalmane Baku, Ashen-Skin Zubera, Dripping-Tongue Zubera, Soulless Revival

3CC: Thief of Hope, Hired Muscle, Gnarled Mass, Takenuma Bleeder, Horobi's Whisper

4CC: Burr Grafter, Hideous Laughter, Befoul, Honden of Night's Reach

5CC: Venerable Kumo x 2, Scuttling Death, Skullmane Baku, Honden of Seeing Winds, Strength of Cedars, Dance of Shadows

7CC: Pus Kami

The Deck

As I sit down to build the deck I'm still not certain whether or not the pair of Hondens will make the cut. When I'm stuck with this sort of decision the first thing I do is to work out all of the cards that will make up the core of every deck I could build. In this case they look like this:

plan on sideboarding into the Honden version when playing against slower decks or any red-blue Arcane/Splice decks that want to hold onto cards in their hand.

This is how the final deck looked:



So now that the deck is settled on it's time to talk a little bit about how it performed.

Round 1

Game 1

The first game started off with an opening hand of Skullsnatcher, Elder, Gnarled Mass and two of each land. Almost perfect! When I top-decked Scuttling Death on turn two I elected to lead with the Elder over the Skullsnatcher as I wanted to make the Gnarled Mass on turn three and then hopefully trade it with something before dropping Scuttling Death on an empty board on turn four. This plan worked perfectly, as my opponent led out with second turn Nezumi Cutthroat and third turn Bloodthirsty Ogre. The Ogre traded with the Mass and the Scuttling Death on turn four put him immediately on the back foot as if he traded it in combat it would then kill his Cutthroat AND get back the Gnarled Mass.

He put up a good attempt to race with Order of the Sacred Bell but a timely Befoul took care of that. It probably wasn't even necessary as a Takenuma Bleeder and Burr Grafter joined in the attack and the combination of Burr Grafter + Scuttling Death + a 3/3 Spirit in the graveyard left him no good options for attacking or blocking and I won the damage race while still at a healthy 9 life.

Game 2

My opening hand for game two was Elder, Skullsnatcher, Befoul along with three Swamps and a Forest.

My opponent led with Forest and Traproot Kami which he'd presumably boarded in so I elected to lead with swamps in the first two turns and Skullsnatcher in an effort to keep the Traproot Kami to a manageable size for a while. Unfortunately for my opponent he then failed to play another land for three turns while I drew a fourth Swamp which enabled the Befoul to take out his only land and the Kami too.

Given that I'd showed him the Befoul in game one his opening hand should never have been a keeper really unless he had nothing but amazing two-drops in there. That seems very unlikely to me so I really don't know what he was thinking in keeping that hand, and on the play no less.

A top-decked Divining Top combined with the Tribe Elder in hand to make sure that there was no coming back even if he did draw lands and the round was over inside ten minutes.

Round 2

Game 1

My opener here featured six lands and a Venerable Kumo. I was going second but I'd almost certainly mulligan that whether playing or drawing first as it just isn't likely to win any games. The six card hand featured one land, Grafter, Mass, Venerable Kumo, Hideous Laughter and Horobi's Whisper so that was another automatic mulligan. The five card hand had two Forests, Thief of Hope, Burr Grafter and Dripping-Tongue Zubera. Not the worst five card hand in the world but it needed a Swamp very early to stand a chance.

Unfortunately my first few draws were Petalmane Baku, Scuttling Death, Pus Kami, Dance of Shadows and Soulless Revival!



Hardly worth keeping 6 lands for...



Finally Forest number three showed up on turn six but I was basically already dead to Frostwielder, Akki Coalflinger and Soratami Rainshaper. I had a turn or two in which the second Swamp might have meant the Hideous Laughter in my hand swung the game back but it never came.

Game 2

My opening hand here was four lands, both Venerable Kumos and the Loam Dweller. Not exciting but definitely not a mulligan on the play either. A fourth turn Burr Grafter shows up to go alongside the Loam Dweller and to give me a great Soulshift target for the Kumos. My opponent's first play was a fourth turn Psychic Puppetry Splicing Glacial Ray, but he Puppetry's my Forest instead of the Loam Dweller so although the spliced Ray takes out the Burr Grafter I can still attack for four. The ability of the Loam Dweller also came in handy as the extra land I put into play on turn four meant I could still cast the Venerable Kumo in hand despite a land being tapped.

An Eerie Procession splicing the Ray takes out Loam Dweller and finds my opponent a Torrent of Stone. Luckily I've drawn both Takenuma Bleeder and Gnarled Mass and I'm able to attack my opponent down to 10 and make both. With a Glacial Ray in his hand that doesn't deal with any of my creatures the game ends pretty quickly from this point

Game 3

I'm going second again here which is very bad in this match-up. It allows him to kill my creatures a turn earlier with his Splice effects and makes it very hard to put enough pressure on. My opener is two Swamps, a Forest, Dripping Tongue Zubera, Hired Muscle, Burr Grafter and Dance of Shadows.

My opponent makes a turn three Akki Coalflinger which I match with my Hired Muscle. On turn four he casts Reach Through Mists splicing Glacial Ray onto the Hired Muscle and I know that's probably game.



My opponent also makes Frostwielder, and I have to burn my Strength of Cedars attacking into his Coalflinger just to try and start racing. Unfortunately the very next turn I draw Whisper, which makes me wish I'd held onto the Strength as a Splice vehicle for it later in the game.

My only choice is to attack and try to race to bring the Dance of Shadows into play but the Frostwielder is shutting out Soulshift so I have to burn the Whisper on that. In the meantime the Honden of Seeing Winds and Dance of Shadows are both sitting dead in my hand while my opponent still has his Glacial Ray in hand along with four other cards. He stabilises with a Kami of Fire's Roar, Hearth Kami and Kaijin of the Vanishing Touch while I spend a couple of turns drawing nothing. Then he drops Shuriken and knows how to use it to deal damage every turn while not letting me gain control of it. There's just nothing I can do about it. If I'd kept the Whisper I could've killed his guy to stop him keeping the Shuriken and

the game might've swung back in my favour. A Hideous Laughter gives me a few more turns but my opponent has plenty more gas and eventually the Ray + Shuriken overwhelm me.

Overall not a bad deck and not a bad performance. I felt a little unlucky in the second match with the double mulligan in game one and the bad draw in game three. I think if I won the coin-flip I could possibly have won game three on the back of it as I would've been on the attack earlier on, which would've brought both the Strength of Cedars and Dance of Shadows into play a lot sooner. I don't feel like I made any horrible mistakes in the draft or deck construction although I do feel I could've tried to be more patient in the third game and just sat back and absorbed some damage rather than trying to race. With the Ray and the Shuriken though it still might not have made a jot of difference.

Coming Soon

I'll be going over *Saviours of Kamigawa* for the next couple of weeks and then bringing that set into play with some draft pick articles. I still haven't seen much of the new set yet but I'm very much looking forward to the changes it'll make to the Limited environment. In the meantime, please let me know on the message board what you think of this new draft format. Too long? Too short? Too much info? I'm very interested to see what people think.

