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Now that the pre-release has come and gone hopefully most of you will have had a chance to play with *Saviors of Kamigawa*. Whenever a set gets added to a limited format it's always worth spending some time reviewing the colours and seeing what has been gained and lost for each colour. When a third set gets added the impact on sealed deck events is much less than the impact on draft formats. Any standard sealed deck from now on will have one *Champions* tournament pack and a booster each of *Betrayers* and *Saviors*. The sole booster of *Saviors* is only replacing one fifth of that card pool and it's replacing a booster of *Betrayers* that would've been used previously. In draft however we're moving from a *Champions-Champions-Betrayers* format into a *Champions-Betrayers-Saviors* format so in this format *Saviors* will make up a full third of your card pool and it's also replacing a *Champions* booster instead. That means one less pack of Kabuto Moths and Glacial Rays to look forward to in the future.

I'm not going to give a card-by-card review although I'll try and remember to talk about all of the important commons. Instead I'm going to take some time looking at each colour and seeing what it adds to the format and also what is lost. The focus will mainly be on the commons as those are the cards that will be your bread and butter for the next few months.

## White

I'd encourage you to open up the Gatherer page of *Saviors* white cards so you can see all of the cards I'll be referring to here.

Losing a *Champions* booster in white is fairly significant. White had the second best common in the set in Kabuto Moth and had a number of other high picks too in cards like Kitsune Blademaster and Cage of Hands. Heart of Light in *Betrayers* was a mediocre substitute for the Cage and in *Saviors* we have another similar card, in Cowed by Wisdom. This card is great in the early turns of the game when you'll probably still be having four or five cards in hand and your opponent will have to commit an entire turn just to attack with one creature. Later on though the number of cards in your hand decreases and the amount of lands your opponent has increases and Cowed by Wisdom naturally becomes less and less effective. So while it's fine in the early few turns of the game, this is far less effective than either Cage of Hands or even Heart of Light when you need something to take care of that eighth turn Dragon. Still playable but for best results you probably want to use it as soon as possible and try to make the most of the tempo advantage that it creates.

Kitsune Loreweaver is a great little two-drop and one of the few aggressive creatures white has in this set. Both it and Moonwing Moth can attack freely into creatures of a similar size without any fear of dying and they'll both be solid picks for any aggressive decks. Later on in the game if you have 3 cards in hand and some mana spare then the Loreweaver can make a fine 2/4 or even 2/7 blocker if you can hold some mana back during your opponent's turn.

Kitsune Bonesetter is potentially very powerful but also very dangerous too. If you can always keep your hand size high it's got a fantastic ability but if you should ever lose that advantage the Bonesetter soon becomes worse than useless. The one good thing about it is that it checks the number of cards in hand when you play the ability. This means that your opponent won't be able to Sweep a bunch of lands into their hand in response to counter it's effect. If it could target players as well it'd be very unfair so while it's considerably weaker without that ability, I can fully understand why it wasn't included. The playability of this will completely depend on the other cards in your deck

and whether you can increase your hand size if you get behind. It'll also depend a little on your mana curve as decks with lower curves can afford to keep more excess lands in hand thus improving the likelihood the Bonesetter will be switched on for the duration of the game.

There's a lot of other playable stuff in white but nothing to really get excited about. Kitsune Dawnblade is overcosted, but Shinen of Star's Light and Torii Watchward will both make your main deck most of the time. The Shinen is no Kitsune Blademaster though and while the Channel ability tacked onto it is nice enough it's lacking that crucial "Draw a card" phrase that would make it decent. White had some great creatures in the previous set with Kabuto Moth and Waxmane Baku being amongst the best those sets had to offer. There's nothing here that matches up to either of them though.



Spiritual Visit and Plow Through Reito are both solid additions to the colour. They're both cheap, Instant and Arcane and are much better for it. Plow Through Reito is a useful combat trick as usually just returning one or two Plains will be enough to win any particular encounter, meaning this won't set you back too much. Later on it's also possible to return four or five Plains for a burst of extra damage directly to your opponent if you use it on an unblocked creature. This flexibility makes it a fine inclusion in any white deck. Spiritual Visit will be worth including if you have the Arcane cards to Splice it onto. At it's worst it's a 1/1 for one mana but you wouldn't play Wandering Ones so you wouldn't play this either if that's all you could get out of it. You should really have at least 3-4 Arcane cards before considering this for inclusion. If you can get just one Splice use out of it though it's probably worth it as then it becomes comparable to Raise The Alarm which was a fine card.

Things improve dramatically with the uncommons in white. Descendant of Kiyomaro is excellent when switched on but there are other solid creatures here in Hand of Honor and Inner-Chamber Guard. The guard in particular makes a great addition to any white-blue deck as he's effectively a 2/4 for two mana against all of your opponent's ground based creatures. That will halt any early attackers, giving you time to get your Flyers into play and start winning the damage race.

Ghost-Lit Redeemer and Nikko-Onna are both playable as well. You might want to avoid Nikko-Onna if you have a lot of Enchantments of your own or if you have zero Arcane cards. His best function is simply as a 2/2 that can be saved in combat. A lot of the time though you'll be able to block an opposing 2/2 with him and cast Reach Through Mists or Spiritual Visit to bounce him right back to your hand so you can use him again.

Amongst the spells we have Hail of Arrows and Charge Across the Araba as the obvious highlights. Hail is impressive but it probably looks a lot better than it is. Sometimes it'll be ridiculous as you trade it for a Nezumi Cutthroat and a Soratami Mirror-Guard for just three mana. Other times though you'll be looking at a Moss Kami or Okina Nightwatch and wondering when you're going to have time to find the mana necessary to kill them. Charge Across the Araba is particularly nasty, especially as it's an Instant. Be very wary of white-blue decks that establish a ground stall with a bunch of guys

and then suddenly decide to turn them all sideways in an all-out attack. If you see that you're probably going to be on the receiving end of a Charge. The annoying thing is, there's not much you can do about it. Anything you block will probably survive and anything you don't block may well end up killing you. It's very easy to see this giving +4/+4 to three or four creatures at one time and no matter what your life total is that's gonna hurt.

Overall white is still living up to its defensive nature. Although there are a few good aggressive creatures here it still wants to sit back and play the long game. It is definitely weakened due to the loss of the *Champions* pack, as there's nothing here that really lives up to its best commons from that set. Kitsune Loreweaver, Moonwing Moth and Cowed by Wisdom are the top commons to look out for when drafting white in the future and it's nice that all of those cards will have an equal home in aggressive and defensive decks alike.



It remains a solid colour to draft simply due to its depth in all three sets. If the other colours also take a hit on power terms then white will still be one of the more popular colours to draft.

## Blue

Once again check out the Gatherer link to see a list of all the blue cards I'll be discussing.

Blue was hurt considerably with the addition of *Betrayers* as its best common flyers were gone, to be replaced only by Shimmering Glasskite. There really are very few other blue commons in *Betrayers* that you're really crossing your fingers on getting. The loss of another *Champions* pack will probably mean its airforce is weakened further. Soratami Rainshaper, Soratami Mirror-Guard and Teller of Tales in particular made up an excellent trio of flyers that helped win many a game for the blue player.

Initial inspection of the common creatures shows a small ray of light though. Moonbow Illusionist and Shinen of Flight's Wings are respectable replacements for Soratami Rainshaper and Teller of Tales, it's just a shame their abilities are so much weaker. The blue Shinen is great solely for the fact that it's a common 3/3 flyer for five mana. I wouldn't expect anyone to be activating its Channel ability on a regular basis.

The Illusionist is basically one of blue's long line of strange mana-fixers. With it you can happily cast that Yamabushi's Flame with just two Island and two Plains in play as you return a tapped land, turn an untapped one into a Mountain and then reply the land you returned to give you access to three mana still. You can also potentially disrupt an opponent if it looks like they only have one land of a specific type and they need access to that colour. Forgetting all that though, what this ability basically says is: "2: Target Kitsune Bonesetter gains '2: Prevent 3 damage to target creature' " or "2: Target Okina Nightwatch gets +3/+3". Both of those abilities are very good abilities in this set and the Illusionist can gain many more different abilities like that depending on the other cards in your deck.



There's one other solid card amongst the rest of blue's creatures and that is Minamo Scrollkeeper, which may bring back some fond memories of anyone who played with Hammerhead Shark. In this format, which has a lot of 2/2s and 2/1s for two mana, the Scrollkeeper will shut down the majority of early attackers, allowing your Flyers to seize the advantage in the air.

The remaining creatures in blue are all pretty weak but there's some nice stuff in the spells which is where blue was really hurt in the last set. Freed from the Real is another nice creature removal spell for blue as it can shut down any creature from attacking for the small cost of one blue mana a turn. This is still weaker than Mystic Restraints though as it doesn't actually deal with cards like Frostwielder or Matsu-Tribe Sniper on a permanent basis. On the flip-side it does have the advantage that it can be beneficially played on your own guys. Sometime over the next few months someone will put Freed from the Real on their own Kabuto Moth or Frostwielder and completely wreck you with it.

Oppressive Will is a counterspell that will almost always do the job when cast. It's better than Thoughtbind certainly, although that's not necessarily saying too much. In general counterspells aren't that great in limited but you shouldn't be too disappointed if you're forced to play this one. Murmurs from Beyond is a slightly improved Counsel of the Soratami but only because it's both Instant and Arcane. Drawing three cards and being forced to discard one really isn't any difference to just drawing two and if hand size is important to your deck you probably won't object to including this.



There's plenty of good stuff to be found amongst the uncommons here although Oboro Envoy is my personal favourite. For the low price of just two mana you can effectively negate almost any attacker allowing you to gang block it freely and kill it off without losing any of your own creatures. Even if you can't block it this card will easily help you win any damage races. Although it's stats are a little weak the ability is a very powerful one and is nicely costed.

Secretkeeper is also excellent as it's in the colour that will hopefully allow you to maintain a higher number of cards in hand and when you can do that you've got a very large flyer for your money.

Overall, although it's lacking anything really great, blue has enough solid cards here to fill out a deck. The two good common flyers make a nice addition and they should come around fairly often as they're in a smaller set. Blue has definitely performed better than it did in *Betrayers*. If you're short of flyers from the first two packs you should hopefully have some chances to grab one or two here although they won't be up to those from *Champions* in terms of power. There is a shortage of Arcane cards here though, so any strategies that try and utilise an early Dampen Thought or an Ire of Kaminari theme will find themselves hurting when the *Saviors* booster gets opened.

## Black

If you want to see the black cards then once again just open them up in Gatherer.

Of all the colours black seems to have been hit the hardest. It held up well through both *Champions* and *Betrayers* but the common creatures here are severely lacking. Only Kuro's Taken and Kami of Empty Graves are really worth including in any deck. The Kami might add some punch to Soulshift decks and makes a great partner to Scuttling Death from *Champions*.

Raving Oni Slave is basically too risky in this format and Deathknell Kami doesn't do anywhere near enough for the mana you invest in it. Shinen of Fear's Chill seems like it's obviously lacking the word "Fear" itself but try as I might I can't find it. Why on earth you'd want to play a five mana 3/2 with no abilities *and* a significant drawback I'll never know.

Gnat Miser could have potential if you're going first and you drop it turn one as it can then force an opponent to discard down to six on their first turn. Any time after that though it's a non-Spirit 1/1 with no real abilities and not worth playing as a result. Deathmask Nezumi would be amazing if it just required that you have the most cards in hand but maintaining a hand of seven cards in Limited is very difficult and 95% of the time this guy will be a standard 2/2 for three mana with no abilities. Once again, not particularly exciting. If you think you can ever get back up to 7 cards in hand – maybe you're mono-black with a couple of Sink Into Takenumas – then Deathmask Nezumi could actually be very good just don't count on it.



Black has two excellent spells to make up for things a little. Kagemaro's Clutch is very solid removal and will deal with the majority of creatures for four mana. Death Denied is a late game card but if you're in any sort of match-up where creature attrition is relevant it'll have a massive swing on the game. It's got a somewhat tricky casting cost but its instant nature and the fact that it's Arcane makes up for that somewhat.

There aren't quite as many hits amongst the uncommons here either. Kemuri-Onna is solid, Razorjaw Oni is powerful but risky, and Hand of Cruelty is obviously welcome in any deck that can cast it consistently.

Ghost-Lit Stalker might actually turn out to be a surprise hit as it can strip an opponent of four cards before they've even hit their sixth turn and doesn't need to attack unlike Okiba-Gang Shinobi. As a lot of the cards in this set benefit from hand size the discard effect becomes even more powerful than usual. Very nice to have this in play against an opponent with a Kitsune Bonesetter in play and Spiraling Embers in their deck.

Exile into Darkness and Kiku's Shadow are two good removal spells that are a much-needed addition as well. Exile in particular will be devastating against decks that rely on deploying a lot of cheap creatures quickly. By trading some of these off and using the Exile to mop up the rest you'll soon get an overwhelming advantage.

Black is definitely weakened in this set. It still has a solid removal spell amongst its commons but there's little else going for it. If you don't have any sort of Soulshift theme going on then you're looking at very slim pickings from this set. Making the most of the first two packs will become very important for any black players from now on. There's nothing amongst the commons that particularly shouts for either aggressive or defensive decks so it will be interesting to see what direction the black decks take over the coming months.



**Next Week**

Next week I'll be going over the remainder of the set and once that's complete we'll start seeing some draft picks with the new set. As the draft walk-throughs have been popular of late I'll hopefully be able to get one of those up once *Saviours* gets running in the **Magic Online** Beta.

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