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# Mikokoro, Center of the Sea

Adrian Sullivan  
Single-Card Strategies  
Wednesday, June 15, 2005



I don't read the **Magic** novels, so I don't know the real story of Mikokoro beyond the flavor text of the card. "Seek it for answers. Seek it for healing." Just a small a part of the flavor text, but somehow I think it evokes a sense of the rest of the card: go here and everyone gets a little bit the wiser. **Magic** has this way of translating knowledge into cards. Take the card **Thirst for Knowledge** – I've always kind of viewed it as wizards monkeying about with technology to see how it works and being all the smarter for it if they take that pocket watch apart. Mikokoro, it seems, is about the journey. Go there and you (as well as everyone around you) know just a wee bit more.



## Classic comparisons

It will be inevitable that this card gets compared to things like **Howling Mine** or **Kami of the Crescent Moon** – they all involve extra card draw for everyone. Well, first of all, Mikokoro doesn't have the art to **Word of Command** hiding in it or Toshi quotes in the flavor text. There are more substantive differences as well.

Both **Howling Mine** and **Kami of the Crescent Moon** begin with the same problem. You spend the mana on your card-drawing card, but it is your opponent who gets the first opportunity to use these extra cards. This is a significant challenge. The classic problem from years back went something like this: drop the **Howling Mine** and on their turn they draw the extra card and then break the **Howling Mine** – ick! You have accomplished nothing and they have drawn an extra card and destroyed one of your cards. Not so good, Al. **Mikokoro, Center of the Sea** dodges this. The card draw from the card might be permanent-based, but it plays out a lot more like **Words of Wisdom**. You both get the cards at the same time, but since the ability is playable at instant speed, you can choose to have the card usable on your own main phase before they get a crack at it.

Another problem with the **Howling Mine** and **Kami of the Crescent Moon** is the idea of Investment. Mike Flores has talked about this idea, but the root of it is simple – you put your money into the card, and you don't get anything right away. A **Kami of the Crescent Moon** isn't as bad (it can attack or block), but a **Howling Mine** doesn't do a darn thing by simply being in play. Over time a **Howling Mine** can set up an environment where your deck might work better than your opponent's, but it takes two whole turns to begin getting ahead with a **Howling Mine** (one turn to regain the card you spent on **Howling Mine** and the next to actually get ahead). Meanwhile, you still have the problem that your opponent is "getting ahead" just as quickly as you are. A Mikokoro, if nothing else, is always a land. Even if you never use the card, it still can be tapped for a single mana and it isn't a dead investment.

## Simple stuff

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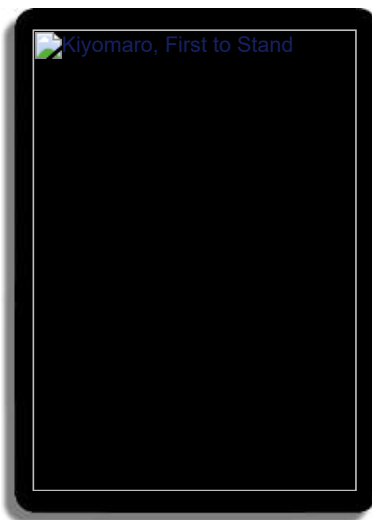
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It's simple stuff, really, but what do you get out of using a Mikokoro? First of all, you get an easy way to fuel all of those *Saviors of Kamigawa* triggers from large hand sizes. Your *Akki Underling* or *Deathmask Nezumi* aren't the typical stuff for constructed decks, but I'm sure that there might be a place for these cards. Not to be Captain Obvious, but they really are a *lot* better when you have at least seven cards in your hand. *Kiyomaro, First to Stand* is *much* more likely to see tournament play, and it gets an incredible boost with a full hand.

All of the "*Maro*" cycle cards can get a boost from a Mikokoro. While there is always the problem of keeping the path clear for the Maro to smack the opponent, this isn't necessarily so hard if you're drawing an extra card a turn. In group games, *Multani, Maro-Sorcerer* can gain a nice boost – maybe it's just an extra megaton to his bombness, but an extra megaton is an extra megaton.

Finally, as a land, you can always search for it. From *Crop Rotation* to *Sylvan Scrying*, there are tons of great ways to find a land. I've built loads of decks running *Wishes*, and *Living Wish* has always been a great way to find a land that you'd like to see in play, but maybe only want to have one of (perhaps because it is a Legend).

## The problem of Legends

Legendary permanents are always a bit of a problem. Take a gander at the decklists from our most recent [Pro Tour from Philadelphia](#). Legends, legends, everywhere... Using Ryan Cimera's White Weenie deck as an example, you can count 1 copy of *Eiganjo Castle*, 4 of *Eight-and-a-Half-Tails*, 3 of *Isamaru*, and 4 of the all-powerful *Jitte*. Mark Herberholz's deck includes 3 single copies of different legends in his main deck. Jeff Novekoff's deck has 15 legends in his main deck, with 1, 2, 3, or 4 copies of various legends.

Legends muck up deckbuilding math. Barring a *Mirror Gallery*, you can't drop a second one into play without losing your first. This means that you can't just automatically play four copies of a legend as if it's any other kind of card. You have to have a reason.

The first reason is simple: you expect your legend to die. Take all of the *Umezawa's Jittes*, even in decks that don't use it very well. You could expect a *Jitte* to die. Some people would run *Umezawa's Jitte* simply as a method to kill other *Umezawa's Jitte*. For land, it can be something else. In Extended, *Wasteland* is pretty omnipresent. If you have a good non-basic land, you can expect it to die. One of the reasons that people running *Gaea's Cradle* in Extended often run four (or "more" with *Living Wish*) is that they can pretty much count on the card to die. To be fair, *Gaea's Cradle* is ridiculously powerful in the right deck as well, but expecting a *Cradle* to not last long isn't a terrible idea.

With lands, the best way to treat extra copies of a legendary land depends on your environment. If you can expect your land to die, treat it like a land. On the other hand, if you don't particularly expect your land to die, when you're counting up your "lands" and "spells" piles as you build your deck, count your extra copies of a legendary land as a spell. It isn't a spell, of course, but if you can't actually put the card into play without hurting yourself, it might as well be a spell that says "I sit in your hand and do nothing". The big reason that none of the Pro Tour Top 8 decklists ran a second copy of a legendary land is that they couldn't expect them to die, and they didn't have room for a second copy of a card that could read "Ugh, how terrible to draw this extra copy, eh?"

***The big reason that none of the Pro Tour Top 8 decklists ran a second copy of a legendary land is that they couldn't expect them to die...***

## Redundancy

A lot of deckbuilding is about redundancy. [My article](#) on *Flames of the Blood Hand* explored this idea a little bit. Essentially, if you have a card that can act a lot like another card, it is almost like you're actually running another copy of that card. Many **Magic** cards essentially come equipped with increasing returns – cast one *Browbeat* and that may be fine, but the second and third ones come back with a kick. Your odds on drawing those extra cards diminish the more of them you've already drawn, and that's where the redundancy kicks in.

Permanent-based card drawing is the kind of redundancy you're looking for in a card like Mikokoro. If your deck is the kind of deck that already runs a *Phyrexian Arena*, *Howling Mine*, *Grafted Skullcap*, or *Jushi Apprentice*, it's pretty likely that a Mikokoro is a good fit in your deck. Just having that option on extra card draw (even if your opponent gets one too) gives you a bit of redundancy in that department. The big key is that you don't *have* to use the card, but you do have the option to.

## Pacing

One of my favorite games in the entire world is Cribbage. I've spent a lot of time playing games with a ton of people and I generally go to most **Magic** tournaments with a Cribbage board. Heck, I keep one in my car.

I've lost more than a few games to my friend Azrael Spear, and one thing I've learned in all of those losses is pacing. Pacing is a key skill to the upper end of Cribbage. Essentially, Cribbage rewards players for deciding how fast the game should be going. Is this a game that should wrap up quickly or crawl? Making the correct decision is very important.

Mikokoro is a great pacing card. If it is the end of your opponent's turn and you have a Mikokoro at the ready, this is a great opportunity for you to make a mistake. Just drawing a card willy-nilly every turn is sometimes going to be the wrong call, especially if you are foregoing actually doing things in favor of everyone drawing a card. In other situations, this can actually be the game winning play. How do you decide?

If your opponent seems to be struggling to find answers to your table, this is a great example of when *not* to activate a Mikokoro. Let your threats on the table run their course and don't risk giving your opponent an escape hatch. On the other hand, when you have a huge mana advantage, activating the Mikokoro can be fantastic. Yes, this will fuel your opponent with mana, but you will be far more likely to be able to actually make use of all of the cards that you have.

If you are the player that is struggling to build up threats or struggling to find an answer, this is another great time to accelerate the game. Yes, you might be handing your opponent some more cards, but you can alter the state of the game as well. When you need a **Wrath of God**, you need a **Wrath of God**. The idea of building up threats is also pretty huge. When you are at a low life with a control deck, a Red burn opponent with 7 cards in hand is a scary opponent. Deciding to cast even an incredibly powerful threat like **Morphling** can be a huge mistake in such a situation. There is only so much mana out there to stop threats.

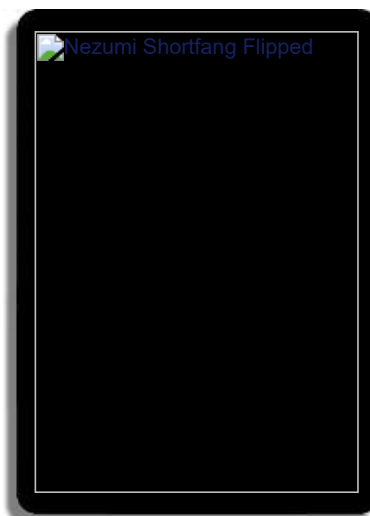
## A small mention of number management

Aside from building up a hand for pacing and threat management, one other thing to think about is number management. A lot of times this is going to be reactive. Your opponent has been going to town on you with a **Nezumi Shortfang** and now it has flipped into Stabwhisker. A larger hand size is a good idea.

Other times, it can be something you use to regulate yourself. If you are playing a Pox deck, for example, you really like to have multiples of 3 - having a hand size of 6 is better than a hand size of 7 or 4 when it comes to **Poxing**. Cards like **Ensnaring Bridge** are also worth mentioning. It can be very easy to actually attack with 2-power creatures (say, a morphed **Blistering Firecat**) when you have a Mikokoro to regulate your hand size.

## Wrapping Up

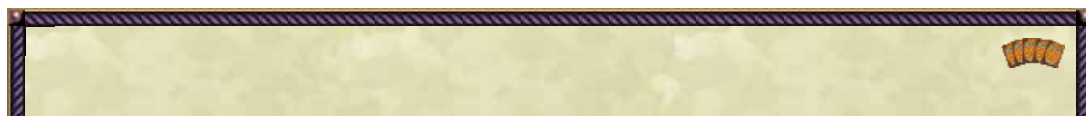
As I've already said, building a deck with Mikokoro isn't exactly something where you expect to run a whole bunch of them. This gave an additional challenge to this article about the decklists. Each of the decks I made only included a single copy of the Mikokoro to run in them. To give you a better idea of how to make practical use of the card, I'm going to include two decklists.



MBC for Regionals with Mikokoro		
60 cards		
1 <b>Shizo, Death's Storehouse</b>	4 <b>Kagemaro, First to Suffer</b>	4 <b>Phyrexian Arena</b>
4 <b>Stalking Stones</b>		4 <b>Wrench Mind</b>
20 <b>Swamp</b>	4 creatures	4 <b>Distress</b>
1 <b>Mikokoro, Center of the Sea</b>		4 <b>Sickening Shoal</b>
		4 <b>Consume Spirit</b>
26 land		1 <b>Beacon of Unrest</b>
		3 <b>Cranial Extraction</b>
		3 <b>Night of Souls' Betrayal</b>
		3 <b>Pithing Needle</b>
		30 other spells

Here we have the control-deck version for using Mikokoro. Mikokoro runs a lot of the roles I've already discussed. It is an "almost"-**Phyrexian Arena**. It can regulate your opponent's handsize to get just a little bit more out of a **Wrench Mind** (or a lucky **Extraction**). It can be used to power up your **Kagemaro**.

In terms of pacing, the card is extremely interesting. This is the kind of deck that can be used to play resource games. The hand destruction can just be a one-for-one proposition a lot of the time, and the removal can play out like that as well. **Distress** and **Extraction** can tend to take the wind out of the sail for a lot of decks' plans, and combined with the abundant creature elimination, you can find yourself in a situation where not much is going on on either side of the table. At this point in the game, by evaluating your opponent's threats and examining your own hand, you can figure out whether speeding up the game is a boon or not. This way of evaluating pacing is about the exact opposite of the next deck.



## Burning Bridge for Extended fun

60 cards

1 Shivan Gorge	4 Mogg Fanatic	4 Ensnaring Bridge
4 Forgotten Cave	4 Grim Lavamancer	4 Firebolt
12 Mountain		4 Magma Jet
4 Barbarian Ring	8 creatures	4 Volcanic Hammer
4 Petrified Field		4 Shrapnel Blast
1 Mikokoro, Center of the Sea		3 Grafted Skullcap
		3 Cursed Scroll
26 land		26 other spells

Here the pacing is based on just getting more threats. You can expect that your opponent is going to begin the game a bit lower on the life scale before they start being able to wail into you. If they happen to be a control deck, building up a hand of threats before your opponent can build up the mana for answers can often be quite easy. A Mikokoro can be that fourth **Grafted Skullcap** that just couldn't quite make the main deck.

### Which kind of Reader Challenge do you like best?

Either way. It's all the same to me, fella.	1619	50.8%
Out with the old, in with the new! I prefer when you don't cover the card at all and let the readers have the first crack at it. Reverse Challenges for me, please.	886	27.8%
I prefer the old format, where you cover the card yourself first in an article, and <i>then</i> the readers send in their ideas.	684	21.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3189</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Well, last week's grand experiment seemed to have gone pretty well overall. In the weeks before the so-called "Reverse" Reader Challenge went to print, I received hundreds of deck submissions. As a group, I think that once we pooled together the ideas of all of the readers out there, **Tortured Existence** was incredibly well-covered.

That's not to say that there weren't any snafus. In order to make sure that there were enough submissions to fill the entire article, I had to allow extra time. I wanted the Tortured Existence Challenge to be able to completely be explored by the readers, and that meant spending several weeks between the announcement of the challenge and the finish of it. On some level, losing the immediacy of a "regular" Challenge does greatly diminish a lot of the anticipation.

Both styles of Reader Challenge would often come with a lot of overlap. Squee, for example, was everywhere in the Tortured Existence Challenge, though he was used in many different ways. There certainly were a lot of decklists these last few weeks that were quite excellent. We all tend to stand on the shoulders of those before us when we create. Reader after reader would rediscover fire at some different stage. Older challenges would have a lot more of their base already worked on by the time that reader would get around to submitting a decklist.

That said, it seemed like there really wasn't a clearly overwhelming favorite in how to handle Challenges. For now, I will continue to use both of these styles to see how much creativity we can spotlight from everyone out there. I hope that you all enjoy it.

Have a great rest of the week!



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