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With last week's article focusing on the topic of signalling I thought I'd try and find a draft where you could see a real-life example of this. The draft walk-throughs in this column can prove useful for a variety of reasons but in today's I'm going to try and pay a little more attention to the signals I was trying to send and those I was interpreting from the player who was passing to me.

This draft also deals with a colour combination I haven't tackled in a walk-through so hopefully it'll be useful for multiple reasons.

For those of you wanting *9th Edition* coverage I'll be doing something on that in the near future but hopefully Matt Vienneau's feature article this week will give you a great start on that particular format.

As is normal, it's a *Champions-Betrayers-Saviors* booster draft this week. Let's get started!

Pack One

I crack open the first pack and am greeted with the following choices:



Pack One, Pick One: Unearthly Blizzard, Callous Deceiver, Commune with Nature, Kami of the Waning Moon, Devoted Retainer, Yamabushi's Storm, Peer Through Depths, Dripping-Tongue Zubera, Deathcurse Ogre, Kodama's Reach, Befoul, Akki Coalflinger, Lure, Soratami Savant, Moonring Mirror

My Pick:

There are only two real options here: Befoul and Soratami Savant. I think the power level of these two cards is quite close although the Savant probably edges it. Sometimes the Savant is just okay as a four-mana 2/2 flyer and sometimes it's amazing as it really stunts your opponent's development. Befoul is almost always better than just okay as it'll always take out an opposing threat against all but the heavy black decks, but it doesn't win games by itself.

I've drafted a lot of blue lately and wanted to try for something different. There's also the old adage "when in doubt, take the removal spell." Either spell sends a pretty clear signal and I eventually chose the removal spell although I'm quite prepared to accept that some people consider the Savant to be superior. This is just the colour I fancied drafting today.

Pack One, Pick Two: Wicked Akuba, Blessed Breath, Sokenzan Bruiser, Hisoka's Guard, Serpent Skin, Nezumi Ronin, Jukai Messenger, Midnight Covenant, Ethereal Haze, Soratami Rainshaper, Dance of Shadows, Hankyu, Orbweaver Kumo, Minamo, School at Water's Edge.

My Pick:

My favourite colour to pair with black is green. In your average green-black deck, Dance of Shadows is a true bomb as it allows your huge men to happily swing past 80% of opposing blockers and when it is cast it'll usually end the game. The next best card I'd be passing up is the Rainshaper and that continues my signal of "draft blue" to the player on my left. I'm happy to take the Dance as it's a powerful card and keeps me on colour.

Pack One, Pick Three: Soratami Cloudskater, Orochi Sustainer, Distress, Kami of the Painter Road, Soul of Magma, Hisoka's Defiance, Soulless Revival, Silent-Chant Zuberu, Ember-Fist Zuberu, Kami of Ancient Law, Honden of Night's Reach, Konda's Hatamoto. Myojin of Life's Web.

My Pick:

The choices here are basically Orochi Sustainer, Kami of Ancient Law and Honden of Night's Reach. I'm thinking I want to go green but I've no need to start drafting green cards yet. Now that this format has slowed down and there are a lot of cards that have a dependency on hand size the Honden is a lot more powerful. I'll happily run just a single black Honden in a deck, which I might not have done before *Saviors* hit. It's another nice on-colour pick and hopefully the Kami of Ancient Law will urge my neighbour towards blue-white.

At this point it's difficult to read any signals coming from the player to my right, there's nothing outstanding here and a rare and a common missing so it's impossible to tell what they might have taken.

Pack One, Pick Four: Venerable Kumo, Gibbering Kami, Kami of the Painted Road, Akki Avalanchers, Hisoka's Defiance, Sakura-Tribe Elder, Akki Rockspeaker, Psychic Puppetry, Orochi Leafcaller, Kitsune Riftwalker, Frostwielder, Nezumi Bone-Reader.

My Pick:

Once again I'm faced with a choice of three: Sakura-Tribe Elder, Frostwielder and Gibbering Kami. The black-green colour combination is a lot more preferable to the black-red one. Black-red decks tend to have to get quite lucky to win usually whereas black-green tends to be a little slower but more consistent with a higher power level of spells in this block now.

It's for this reason I initially discount Frostwielder as a pick. I think a fourth pick Frostwielder might look like a signal to go red for some people but I don't think it's valued that highly by most people. Certainly Glacial Ray and Yamabushi's Flame would've been taken over it. The Elder is more of a signal to go green but again there is a perfectly playable on-colour card here even if it's a little weaker in power. Until I get some clear signal from the player on my right I want to stay on colour. This also has the advantage of cutting the black cards hard so the guy on my left won't be tempted to go into blue-black, even if they opened up a black-removal spell as their first pick. Gibbering Kami it is.

Pack One, Pick Five: Harsh Deceiver, Unearthly Blizzard, River Kaijin, Commune with Nature, Kitsune Healer, Ethereal Haze, Akki Rockspeaker, Field of Reality, Order of the Sacred Bell, Kami of the Palace Fields, Thousand-legged Kami

My Pick:

Ok this is the time to move into green. With a bunch of mediocre cards in the other colours Order of the Sacred Bell is clearly the best card in the pack. It does make me wish I had have taken that Tribe Elder in the last pack now but having the Gibbering Kami instead won't hurt too much.

When someone passes you a pack for your fifth pack and there's a clear 'best card' in there it's highly likely that they aren't drafting that colour. By taking the Order of the Sacred Bell I'm also passing a pack with Harsh Deceiver, River Kaijin, Kitsune Healer, Ethereal Haze and Kami of the Palace Fields in it. None of those cards are particularly appealing but together they should create an impression for the guy to my left that blue-white is being under-drafted. Order of the Sacred Bell is the clear pick here.

Pack One, Pick Six: Kitsune Diviner, Counsel of the Soratami, Pious Kitsune, Desperate Ritual, Lifted by Clouds, Mystic Restraints, Moss Kami, Gale Force, Blood Rites, Iname, Death Aspect

My Pick:

There are no good black cards getting passed my way now; this is a little worrying but not overly so. If green is open (as it appears to be) then I can focus on black in *Betrayers* where it is strong and where I've cut that colour off hard, and then focus on green in *Saviors* where that colour is at its strongest. Recognising which colours are the most powerful in each set is important in a draft containing three different sets as it can make the difference between getting passed lots of quality picks from a deep colour or getting a lot of mediocre stuff from a weaker one.

The Moss Kami clearly indicates that green is wide open and I should therefore be able to pick up all the nice green goodies in *Saviors*. Even as early as the fifth and sixth picks here, I'm thinking ahead to the last booster. Moss Kami is the pick here. In taking it I'm also passing along a Mystic Restraints and that may well get taken by the blue guy on my left, thus solidifying him in that colour.

Pack One, Pick Seven: Call to Glory, Floating-Dream Zuberu, Kashi-Tribe Warriors, Cursed Ronin, Orochi Leafcaller, Ragged Veins, Terashi's Cry, Sensei's Divining Top, Myojin of Seeing Winds.

My Pick:

There's nothing outstanding here, but I think the Divining Top may end up making the cut for the main deck here. Really wishing I had that Elder now though as the shuffle effect would be a nice synergy with the Top. There's a good chance I might pick up an Elder Pine of Jukai or two in *Saviors* though and the Top works really well with those so it's the correct pick here.

Pack One, Pick Eight: Vine Kami, Waking Nightmare, Devoted Retainer, Devouring Rage, Callous Deceiver, Ashen-Skin Zuberu, Quiet Purity, Crushing Pain.

My Pick:

Two mediocre black cards to choose from as an eighth pick makes me feel better about drafting black. I think the Waking Nightmare is the better card but I'm very aware of mana curve issues already and I think I want the two-drop here. As a spirit it may well come in useful for Soulshift purposes, as these colours are typically strong in that area. Ashen-Skin Zuberu gets chosen ahead of Waking Nightmare because I feel I may need the early creature to slow an opponent down a little.

Pack One, Pick Nine: Unearthly Blizzard, Commune with Nature, Yamabushi's Storm, Peer Through Depths, Dripping-Tongue Zuberu, Deathcurse Ogre, Moonring Mirror.

My Pick:

The Dripping-Tongue Zuberu laps the table from the original pack. There was only a Kodama's Reach in there as the other playable green card so it's quite possible I'm in a draft with only two green drafters at the table. If that is in fact the case then I'm going to be doing very well in *Saviors*.

Late picks: Minamo, School at Water's Edge, Orochi Sustainer, Venerable Kumo, Commune with Nature, Gale Force, Terashi's Cry.

Some very nice late picks this draft! A tenth-pick Sustainer is ridiculous and it makes me think there may not even be a second green drafter at the table, or if there is he must only be sitting two or three seats around the table to my left. The Venerable Kumo may make the deck and the Commune with Nature is just about acceptable, and even slightly playable with the Divining Top probably in the deck.

From the first round of boosters the cards that might potentially be played look like this:

1CC: Sensei's Divining Top, Commune with Nature

2CC: Ashen-Skin Zuberu, Dripping-Tongue Zuberu, Orochi Sustainer

3CC:

4CC: Order of the Sacred Bell, Gibbering Kami, Befoul, Honden of Night's Reach

5CC: Venerable Kumo, Dance of Shadows

6CC: Moss Kami

Having twelve cards that are potentially playable after pack one is very good and is an excellent foundation for the deck. Picking up that green was being under-drafted gave some decent late picks and hopefully the signals to "go blue" to the neighbour on my left will have been understood and will give me some nice picks in Betrayers too.

At this point I suspect that the Kodama's Reach I opened in pack one went to the player after the blue guy on my left. As such I don't expect a lot of good green stuff in Betrayers but I cut black pretty hard so am optimistic there'll be some decent black coming around to me.

Pack Two



Pack Two, Pick One: Shimmering Glasskite, Sakura-Tribe Springcaller, Takenuma Bleeder, Kami of False Hope, Torrent of Stone, Quillmane Baku, Akki-Blizzard Herder, Veil of Secrecy, Vital Surge, Bile Urchin, Mending Hands, Callow Jushi, Mark of the Oni, Walker of Secret Ways, Shining Shoal.

My Pick:

Well, it's not the greatest of packs here but there are a few playable cards. The best cards are unfortunately not in my colours and I think I want to stick to my colours this time as I've drafted a lot of playable cards in both of them. Takenuma Bleeder is the better choice over Sakura-Tribe Springcaller. The Springcaller is a fine man, but 3/3s for three are excellent in this sort of deck and will help me deal some early damage and set up the Dance of Shadows as a finisher.

Pack Two, Pick Two: Kami of Tattered Shoji, Frostling, Ribbons of the Reikai, Sakura-Tribe Springcaller, Horobi's Whisper, Moonlit Strider, Ire of Kaminari, Toils of Night and Day, Traproot Kami, Call for Blood, Terashi's Grasp, Sosuke's Summons, Indebted Samurai, Nourishing Shoal.

My Pick:

A Whisper second pick is nice and is easily the best card in the pack. This is the first indication that cutting the black in pack one worked as expected.

Pack Two, Pick Three: Takenuma Bleeder, Hundred-Talon Strike, Shinka Gatekeeper, Call for Blood, Child of Thorns, Okiba-Gang Shinobi, First Volley, Vital Surge, Crawling Filth, Silverstorm Samurai, Splinter, Nezumi Shadow-Watcher, Aura Barbs.

My Pick:

The Shinobi is a better pick than the Bleeder in the vast majority of circumstances and is definitely the preferred pick here. Having both it and the Bleeder in the pack again indicates that black might be open for two seats to my left. I still haven't seen a playable blue card yet as well which is exactly what I'd expect given the blue guy on my left.

Pack Two, Pick Four: Kami of Tattered Shoji, Ninja of the Deep Hours, Child of Thorns, Moonlit Strider, Kumano's Blessing, Veil of Secrecy, Matsu-Tribe Sniper, Stir the Grave, Mending Hands, God's Eye, Gate to the Reikai, Quash.

My Pick:

A choice of two decent green picks in this pack and it's the Sniper for me. I underrated this guy initially but he often just wins a game for you. And even when your opponent doesn't have any flyers, he may well still trade for a random 2/1 dork. I'd be happy with a Child of Thorns for the deck as it makes early blocking decisions tricky for an opponent, which increases the chances that an Okiba-Gang Shinobi will hit them. Overall though the Sniper is the better pick.

Pack Two, Pick Five: Frostling, Ribbons of the Reikai, Call for Blood, Moonlit Strider, Ire of Kaminari, Uproot, Blessing of Leeches, Sowing Salt, Kitsune Palliator, Baku Altar.

My Pick:

A disappointing pack here with absolutely nothing playable in my colours. I already have two Soulshift creatures and if the deck has a heavy Spirit theme I might want to play the Baku Altar, or at the very least maybe board it in. As it's the only card I might vaguely play, it gets my vote.

Pack Two, Pick Six: Shinka Gatekeeper, Skullmane Baku, Goblin Cohort, Crack the Earth, Floodbringer, Petalmane Baku, Blessing of Leeches, Heart of Light, Akki Raider.

My Pick:

I already have a few 1/2 guys for two mana and without any colour to splash I don't anticipate the need for a Petalmane Baku. The Skullmane Baku therefore gets my pick and may even get played if I have the Spirits and Arcane cards to warrant it.

Pack Two, Pick Seven: Skullsnatcher, Mistblade Shinobi, Psychic Spear, Floodbringer, Uproot, Call for Blood, Takeno's Cavalry, Empty-Shrine Kannushi

My Pick:

Another respectable late(ish) pick here. Psychic Spear would make a nice sideboard card but the two-power Skullsnatcher will almost certainly make the main deck and is the correct choice as a result.

Pack Two, Pick Eight: Frost Ogre, Ribbons of the Reikai, Skullmane Baku, Ire of Kaminari, Petalmane Baku, Crawling Filth, Kaijin of the Vanishing Touch, Sakiko, Mother of Summer.

My Pick:

There's a very late Frost Ogre here; that's surprising, but it's not something I would want. While I might play one Skullmane Baku I probably wouldn't play two unless I had a ridiculous amount of Spirits and that isn't going to happen. The pick here doesn't make too much difference; none of the cards are going to be played. I eventually decide on the Petalmane Baku just to have a variety of choices when it comes to deckbuilding.

Pack Two, Pick Nine: Kami of False Hope, Quillmane Baku, Akki Blizzard-Herder, Veil of Secrecy, Vital Surge, Mending Hands, Walker of Secret Ways.

My Pick:

As there's nothing here I would want to either play or sideboard I take the best card in the pack: Kami of False Hope.

Late Picks: Sakura-Tribe Springcaller, Nezumi Shadow-Watcher, Stir the Grave, Uproot, Blessing of Leeches, Takeno's Cavalry

Only the Springcaller will make the deck but that's still a nice card to pick up this late.

At this point the playable cards now amount to:

- 1CC:** Sensei's Divining Top, Commune with Nature
- 2CC:** Ashen-Skin Zubera, Dripping-Tongue Zubera, Orochi Sustainer, Petalmane Baku, Skullsnatcher, Matsu-Tribe Sniper
- 3CC:** Takenuma Bleeder, Horobi's Whisper
- 4CC:** Order of the Sacred Bell, Gibbering Kami, Sakura-Tribe Springcaller, Befoul, Honden of Night's Reach
- 5CC:** Venerable Kumo, Skullmane Baku, Okiba-Gang Shinobi, Dance of Shadows
- 6CC:** Moss Kami

This is still a very solid deck at this point but I'm optimistic it'll improve further still in *Saviors* as long as those signals to go green give the results I'm expecting.

Pack Three



Pack Three, Pick One: Torii Watchward, Shinen of Fury's Fire, Moonbow Illusionist, Shinen of Life's Roar, Kagemaro's Clutch, Shinen of Star's Light, Plow Through Reito, Glitterfang, Cut the Earthly Bond, Promised Kannushi, Deathknell Kami, Measure of Wickedness, Oboro Envoy, Presence of the Wise, Ayumi, the Last Visitor.

My Pick:

There's an Oboro Envoy in the pack that is a little annoying to pass up on, but I think this deck doesn't need to splash it to be powerful. The Clutch is a fine pick and another removal spell, which this deck only has two of so far. This deck is more aggressive than controlling and the Envoy doesn't

have as big a place in this deck as it might in others. Staying on colour with the Clutch is the best plan here.

Pack Three, Pick Two: Nightsoil Kami, Deathmask Nezumi, Cowed by Wisdom, Akki Underling, Shinen of Flight's Wings, Fiddlehead Kami, Into the Fray, Murmurs from Beyond, Dosan's Oldest Chant, Gnat Miser, Araba Mothrider, Footsteps of the Goryo, Inner-Chamber Guard, Mikokoro, Center of the Sea.

My Pick:

A horrible second pack. There are some playable spells but nothing exciting. I'd expect to get Nightsoil Kamis and Deathmask Nezumis much later than this and don't feel the need to draft one here.

After some thought I realise I have a very nice interaction between Mikokoro and the black Honden. I can activate Mikokoro during my upkeep to make my opponent discard whatever non-instant he draws and it could potentially be a one-way Howling Mine in this deck. I decide to go with Mikokoro as it'll fit in the deck and also improve any additional Kagemaro's Clutches that make the deck.

Pack Three, Pick Three: Inner Calm, Outer Strength, Kagemaro's Clutch, Kitsune LoReweaver, Shinen of Fury's Fire, Descendant of Soramaro, Elder Pine of Jukai, Glitterfang, Ideas Unbound, Matsu-Tribe Birdstalker, Death of a Thousand Stings, Curtain of Light, Gaze of Adamaro, Measure of Wickedness.

My Pick:

Another pack, another removal spell. With both the Inner Calm, Outer Strength and Elder Pine here it's a shame to have to go with the removal spell but in this deck that fourth removal spell really increases the likelihood of drawing one consistently.

Pack Three, Pick Four: Barrel Down Sokenzan, Descendant of Soramaro, Shinen of Life's Roar, Death Denied, Moonwing Moth, Akki Drillmaster, Cut the Earthly Bond, Sakura-Tribe Scout, Kuro's Taken, Kitsune Bonesetter, Stampeding Serow, Yuki-Onna.

My Pick:

A fourth pick and still a choice of two great green cards. Stampeding Serow can be very powerful and although I have a few early drops in green I won't necessarily be playing all of them. I also have plenty of four-drops already and would prefer the quality two-drop. I actually think the Shinen is better than the Serow too, and that makes it an easy decision for me.

Pack Three, Pick Five: Cowed by Wisdom, Akki Drillmaster, Oppressive Will, Elder Pine of Jukai, Kami of Empty Graves, Torii Watchward, Path of Anger's Flame, Dreamcatcher, Matsu-Tribe Birdstalker, Plow Through Reito, Trusted Advisor

My Pick:

Well if I can't take Elder Pine third, I guess I'll have to get one fifth! A great card to get late and the first real benefit of picking up the signals from the first pack.

Pack Three, Pick Six: Minamo Scrollkeeper, Nightsoil Kami, Sink into Takenuma, Spiritual Visit, Inner Fire, Dosan's Oldest Chant, Promised Kannushi, Shinen of Fear's Chill, Haru-Onna, Locust Miser.

My Pick:

Another 1st-3rd pick green card coming around sixth. This is great card to have in any deck and a solid addition to mine. No real decision to make here.

Pack Three, Pick Seven: Oppressive Will, Fiddlehead Kami, Moonbow Illusionist, Curtain of Light, Into the Fray, Dreamcatcher, Dosan's Oldest Chant, Deathknell Kami, AEther Shockwave.

My Pick:

There are no cards in this pack I'm ever going to play – I have too many decent creatures already to cause Fiddlehead Kami to ever make it in. The best choice is to take the best remaining card from the blue guy on my left and I take the Illusionist. Sorry blue guy, but there's no need for you to get a great flyer 8th pick and nothing for me here.

Pack Three, Pick Eight: Sink into Takenuma, Kitsune Dawnblade, Oboro Breezecaller, Rending Vines, Shinen of Fear's Chill, Spiritual Visit, Briarknit Kami, Sunder from Within.

My Pick:

Here's another really solid addition to the deck in the Briarknit Kami. Although Spirits and Arcane cards aren't a huge theme in this deck there will still probably be one or two cast making him a nice flexible card to have in the deck.

Pack Three, Pick Nine: Torii Watchward, Plow Through Reito, Cut the Earthly Bond, Promised Kannushi, Deathknell Kami, Presence of the Wise

My Pick:

Although a late Plow Through Reito is a nice gift for someone I still want the Promised Kannushi here. He's a potential sideboard card against some decks and is useful to have around for that reason.

Late Picks: Nightsoil Kami, Inner Calm, Outer Strength, Sakura-Tribe Scout, Matsu-Tribe Birdstalker, Dosan's Oldest Chant, Oppressive Will.

The highlights here are a Nightsoil Kami that might make the cut and a ridiculously late Inner Calm, Outer Strength in this pack makes it all the way around the table from pack three. This confirms the fact that there were only two green drafters at the table and the other went with the Elder Pine that was also in that pack.

Adding all these cards to the deck gives the final pool of potentially playable cards looking like this:

1CC: Sensei's Divining Top, Commune with Nature, Promised Kannushi

2CC: Ashen-Skin Zuberu, Dripping-Tongue Zuberu, Orochi Sustainer, Petalmane Baku, Skullsnatcher, Matsu-Tribe Sniper, Shinen of Life's Roar

3CC: Takenuma Bleeder, Horobi's Whisper, Elder Pine of Jukai, Inner Calm, Outer Strength

4CC: Order of the Sacred Bell, Gibbering Kami, Sakura-Tribe Springcaller, Haru-Onna, Befoul, Honden of Night's Reach, Kagemaro's Clutch x 2

5CC: Venerable Kumo, Skullmane Baku, Okiba-Gang Shinobi, Briarknit Kami, Dance of Shadows

6CC: Moss Kami, Nightsoil Kami

Lands: Mikokoro, Center of the Sea

Moving into green definitely paid dividends as there were some fantastic late picks in *Saviors* and that really gives some flexibility in deck construction.

The black I'd cut off in pack one also came around in *Saviors* too with Whisper, Takenuma Bleeder and Okiba-Gang Shinobi all being shipped to me. Overall things went very smoothly. It would've been nice to have some more powerful first or second picks but I can't really complain with this card pool.

When starting on building the deck I first select the core cards that will definitely make the cut no matter what:

2CC: Orochi Sustainer, Matsu-Tribe Sniper, Shinen of Life's Roar

3CC: Takenuma Bleeder, Horobi's Whisper, Elder Pine of Jukai, Inner Calm, Outer Strength

4CC: Order of the Sacred Bell, Gibbering Kami, Sakura-Tribe Springcaller, Haru-Onna, Befoul, Honden of Night's Reach, Kagemaro's Clutch x 2

5CC: Okiba-Gang Shinobi, Briarknit Kami, Dance of Shadows

6CC: Moss Kami, Nightsoil Kami

Lands: Mikokoro, Center of the Sea

That's already a total of 20 spells so there really isn't much room left already. The candidates to fill the final slots are:

Ashen-Skin Zuberu, Commune with Nature, Dripping-Tongue Zuberu, Petalmane Baku, Sakura-Tribe Scout, Sensei's Divining Top, Skullmane Baku, Skullsnatcher, Venerable Kumo.

Although the deck has a number of four, five and six drops it does have the Sustainer in there to up the mana cost. I still feel a little shaky with 17 lands but I decide to include Sensei's Divining Top to make me feel better about the lands (it can help dig through some cards to get the mana flowing) and because it has a great interaction with the Elder Pine of Jukai to provide some ridiculous late game advantage if I get to that stage. It can also dig for specific cards like the Mikokoro + Honden combo.

I also decide to include the Venerable Kumo as is there's one thing that could give this deck fits it's some quick early flyers. With only one flyer itself and four removal spells a couple of unanswered flyers could be problematic. The Kumo is fine, and there are lots of Soulshift targets for it too so it's hardly bad against non-flying decks either.

With one slot left I finally select the Skullsnatcher. I don't really need the additional two-drop 1/2 Zuberu and I'd rather have the extra power to trade with other creatures and to try and deal some early damage and set up a lethal Dance of Shadows that much sooner.

The final main-deck therefore looked like this:



Limited Information

This leaves the potential list of sideboard cards containing:

Ashen-Skin Zubera, Baku Altar, Commune with Nature, Dripping-Tongue Zubera, Gale Force, Nezumi Shadow-Watcher, Petalmane Baku, Promised Kannushi, Sakura-Tribe Scout, Skullmane Baku, Uproot.

That's a nice selection and should give plenty of options against the problems this deck might face.

Time to see how it played out.

Round One

The first game I had a second turn Skullsnatcher and third turn Elder Pine of Jukai but with a hand of mostly four- and five-drops, including a Gibbering Kami, a missed land drop on turn four hurt quite badly. Luckily I was able to trade the Skullsnatcher off and not fall too far behind on the board. My opponent was playing blue-black and looked to be a little flooded himself so I had time to recover. Turn five again failed to produce a land but my opponent only had a Descendant of Soramaro. The land finally showed up on turn six and the Gibbering Kami triggered the Elder Pine only to reveal three spells!

By this time, though, my hand contained two Kagamaro's Clutches, the Order of the Sacred Bell and Honden of Night's Reach. I dropped the Honden to start clearing out my opponent's hand and negate his Descendant's ability figuring I could trade guys off or kill them with the Clutch later on once I'd gotten the card advantage out of the Honden.

Sure enough, that's basically how things played out. I was casting a spell every turn while my opponent was forced to burn spells like Phantom Wings and discard Devouring Greed. My creatures

were also bigger than his too so he was in a bad position when it came to attacking. I eventually drew enough lands to get a Moss Kami down and my opponent had no real way to deal with it apart from blocking with three guys. Once that trade was made I was in a very safe position and took the game easily.

I only boarded in the Skullmane Baku here but that's a great card against blue-black decks. They often have few ways of removing it and its ability can really hurt the deck that has no pump spells and a number of fragile one-toughness flyers.

Game Two

My hand in game two was all removal containing Whisper, Befoul and Clutch along with my Briarknit Kami. I was happy to see my opponent lead out with an irrelevant Minamo Scrollkeeper, which was one creature I didn't have to worry about attacking me. I killed off a Callous Deceiver and then a Descendant of Soramaro and finally got the Briarknit Kami out on turn five. A Gibbering Kami pumped it up to a 4/4 and an Order of the Sacred Bell joined it the turn after.

I was able to use the Clutch to take out a Soratami Mirror-Guard to keep my attack up and after that my opponent had run out of gas. The Scrollkeeper eventually double-blocked the Order with the help of an Oboro Breezecaller but my opponent never drew an answer to the Briarknit Kami and that soon won the second game.

Round Two

My opening hand in game one was about as pretty as it gets:

Swamp, Forest, Orochi Sustainer, Sakura-Tribe Springcaller, Kagemaro's Clutch, Swamp, Moss Kami

I won the flip as well and my third-turn Springcaller faced off against an opposing Gnarled Mass. A land had dutifully appeared so the fourth-turn Moss Kami came out. My opponent did nothing in his turn and I suspected some sort of Giant Growth trick so just dropped the Clutch on the Gnarled Mass for -3/-3 and smashed in for eight! If my opponent did have a Giant Growth spell he should probably have burned it there just to prevent some damage but he did not do so.

My opponent made a Sakura-Tribe Elder and some equipment on his fifth turn and when he chumped the Springcaller I was able to upgrade the Sustainer to an Okiba-Gang Shinobi I'd drawn the previous turn. This left my opponent on four life, facing down four creatures and with only three cards in hand. Needless to say, I managed to pull the game out from that position.

Game Two

The second game was almost as brutal as the first. A second-turn Shinen of Life's Roar from me watched an opposing third-turn Shinen of Fury's Fire go past it and hit me for two. I attacked back and had a Takenuma Bleeder on my third turn which forced my opponent's Shinen to stay at home.

My opponent had no fourth-turn play, so I hit with the Bleeder and followed up with my Order of the Sacred Bell.

My opponent then tapped out for a Soul of Magma on his turn, which was exactly what I was hoping for. I'd had Inner Calm, Outer Strength in hand since the start of the game and attacked with everything. My Shinen was obviously double-blocked and the pump spell gave it +4/+4 to keep it alive, kill both his guys and allow my other creatures to drop him to ten as well.

My opponent reloaded the next turn with a Blademane Baku and Kitsune Blademaster. This time I had the Befoul I'd been holding and took out the Blademaster. My attack then allowed the Shinen to eat the Blademane Baku while my other guys dropped him to three.

So once again, it's still only turn six and I'm sitting with three guys including a Shinen, and my opponent is on three and has nothing on the table. It's not often you manage two turn-six wins against an opponent who is casting spells but when this deck decided to perform there was almost nothing my opponent could do about it.

Round Three

My draw was slow this game and I had no second or third turn plays. Unfortunately my opponent had a Genju of the Spires and freely attacked into my three untapped lands. While it would've been nice to have a Rend Spirit to punish such a play I had nothing and had to take the damage.

On the next turn, a Gibbering Kami held the Genju back but my opponent just had a Shinen of Fury's Fire instead. I took a turn to drop my Honden in an effort to clear my opponent's hand so I wouldn't have to worry about combat tricks. It would be hard for him to both cast spells and activate his Genju this early in the game so the Honden seemed better than playing a creature this turn.

The Gibbering Kami traded with the Shinen next turn and my opponent played out a Skullsnatcher and Kuro's Taken. I had a Venerable Kumo to hold off his guys but one of his last two cards was a Torrent of Stone and it killed the Kumo and I was forced to take three. The Honden snatched my opponent's last card – a Frost Ogre.

At this point I desperately needed to draw a land. I had five in play and a Gibbering Kami, Order of the Sacred Bell and Matsu-Tribe Sniper along with plenty of other spells in hand. If I could cast two guys next turn I could block the Genju and prevent the others from attacking. Unfortunately I was not that lucky, drawing only a Kagamaro's Clutch. I cast the Gibbering Kami and had to trade it with the Genju and still take three damage as well, putting me on only six.

My opponent also drew the only spell I can imagine being relevant here – a Bile Urchin! With five lands in play he was able to attack with the Genju *and* still be able to cast the Urchin and recast the Genju as well. I've never been so unhappy to have my opponent top-deck a Bile Urchin in my life!

I did draw the land I needed the following turn and cast the Order and the Sniper. This meant my opponent would lose his last Mountain and the Skullsnatcher if he attacked and so he had to hold back for a turn. I then dropped a Nightsoil Kami and my opponent traded off my Sniper for his Genju when he drew another Mountain to cast it on.

Everything was looking good the next turn when I Clutched away the Skullsnatcher. My opponent now had only a Bile Urchin and the Kuro's Taken along with a single Mountain for his Genju against my board of Order of the Sacred Bell and Nightsoil Kami while I still had Moss Kami in hand.

I also had one of the combos I had drafted as I'd drawn Mikokoro, Center of the Sea to go alongside the Honden which meant I could draw two cards a turn from here on in.

So everything is looking good and I'm confident I can trade off the Nightsoil Kami and use the Soulshift ability to return a guy and still draw two cards a turn from Mikokoro.

So my opponent obviously draws Blind with Anger... The Nightsoil Kami swings in and I have no choice but to block with my Order and take two damage as well. Onto game two then.

There was a lot of sideboarding for this match. I bring in Promised Kannushi, Baku Altar, Dripping Tongue Zuberu and Uproot. That gives me a lot of answers to the Genju and a nice steady stream of creatures which trade off with his mediocre X/1 guys while gaining some card advantage too. The Sniper, Befoul, Dance of Shadows and another card I now forget hit the board as they're of little use in this matchup.

Game Two

I was forced to mulligan a six-spell opening hand in game two, but my hand of Shinen of Life's Roar, Venerable Kumo and Promised Kannushi threatened to recover some of that lost card advantage. It was looking ok until I got Distressed on turn two.

My opponent took the Kumo but I still had the Kannushi which could get back the discarded Kumo, which could then in turn get back the Shinen if that died. I also drew my Gibbering Kami, which opened up even more potential to abuse the Soulshift chain and run my opponent's black-red deck out of cards.

Once again my opponent had exactly the card he needed though – Cunning Bandit this time! He also had a Kami of the Waning Moon to put the first counter on it. I had five lands along with Nightsoil Kami and Moss Kami in hand so once again needed to draw the land to drop the Nightsoil Kami and try to overwhelm the Bandit with the long Soulshift chain. Alas I drew only a Takenuma Bleeder so the bigger guys had to wait a turn.

Or at least they would've done except that my opponent then had Sink into Takenuma as the very last card in his hand to both activate the Cunning Bandit *and* make me discard my two fatties! It seemed like just as my deck ran to perfection in round two this time my opponent's deck decided to give him every single spell he could wish for in the situations we were in.

My opponent attacked with a Scuttling Death at this point and I couldn't block with any of my Soulshift guys as my opponent would simply steal them with the Bandit and then get the Soulshift triggers himself. At any point he could trade the Death off with one of my guys, steal the Promised Kannushi with the Bandit, and then sacrifice the Death to kill the Kannushi. The Scuttling Death trigger then gets back his own Shinen of Fury's Fire while my Kannushi trigger gets back his Scuttling Death for him. I basically lose two guys while gains two. Not a good situation.

I tried to stay in the game for a while and I had four or five turns to draw either Horobi's Whisper, or one of the two Clutches to take out the Bandit and completely turn the game around but I drew nothing but a succession of lands and irrelevant chump blockers. Eventually I had to start blocking and at that point the game was over. The Bandit meant all of my Soulshift guys benefited my opponent and not me. There was nothing I could do and the game soon slipped away.

Summing Up

I do feel that without the Cunning Bandit in this game I would've easily won. With the Kannushi returning the Nightsoil Kami, the Nightsoil Kami returning the Kumo, the Kumo returning the Gibbering Kami, the Gibbering Kami returning the Shinen of Life's Roar... the list is almost endless and there's no way any black-red deck can kill that many creatures and still stay in the game.

The large number of solid sideboard cards I had here also made me confident that I would've done well in any further games. Maybe I shouldn't have boarded the Befoul out but with the majority of his creatures being black in game one I stand by that decision.

In round two I got all of the cards I needed to demolish my opponent, I guess it's only fair that my opponent in the final got all of the cards they needed too. That's just **Magic** and there's nothing any

of us can do to change it.

Overall I was very happy with the deck. Picking up the signals in pack one clearly helped the deck go from average to excellent in the third pack. This draft is a great examples of signalling in action as the signal I sent to "Go blue, avoid black" to my neighbours clearly worked. At the same time the signals being sent were also very relevant and helped shape the draft.

It was shame not to win, but there were a few crucial draws I needed that I missed and some greats ones for my opponent's and I don't feel there was anything that could've been done with the way the cards fell. You can't win them all, I guess!

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