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So You've First-Picked an Oblivion Ring... Now What?

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This week posed a terrible dilemma for me. You see, it's Kithkin week here at magicthegathering.com, and I'm not a fan. After going Kithkin whenever the opportunity presented itself in the many drafts that I've done since *Lorwyn's Magic Online* release, I can safely conclude that they're weak. I can feel the build-up of public outrage, but quell yourselves, readers! Kithkin have two problems. First off, they do not work well together as a tribe and, secondly, all the cards that do work as a tribe are not very good. I will go into both of those statements in more detail later.



Kithkin are also, unfortunately, white's main tribe. This is a dire reflection on the colour as a whole. All the Merfolk cards, despite seeming to have white mana symbols on them, are in fact blue cards. The white Treefolk don't really add anything to a tribe I consider weak to begin with. This means the colour has a problem, making it the worst in *Lorwyn* (Merfolk cards aside).

This all makes for some very interesting drafting. Several things occur all at once. First, very few players really want to be white. Then there are those whose first booster offers them no other choice, those who opened a *Summon the School* and will now snap up any of the better white cards that come their way. And then there are those who get passed all the good white cards when the packs dry up and have little choice but to start picking white cards. On top of all this, you have the players who actually like white as a colour and the opportunists who pick white as they wish to be one of the only two players at the table drafting it. And by the only two players, I mean, the only two really drafting it as a colour, and not just taking all the *Oblivion Rings* to splash... which brings us nicely round to the dilemma of what happens when you are forced to pick an *Oblivion Ring*.

So You First-Picked Oblivion Ring....

There are several options in front of you. Unsurprisingly, the best option is to treat it as a blue card and to swim with the big fishes if they get passed to you. This won't always happen, meaning you have to have a back-up plan. I prefer to ignore the fact that I've just picked a white card and take the best cards out of the next few packs. If I wind up white then cool, if not, then I can always pick up a *Shimmering Grotto* and a *Vivid Land* or go green and splash it, or, as a last resort, I can just leave it in the sidebar. Or, of course, you could just draft white.

If we go white, what options do we have? There are several options other than Merfolk (which I will dip into in a separate article as there is too much depth there to talk about now). Probably the best option is to immediately treat white as your back-up colour and focus on picking up a tribal theme elsewhere and just take what good white cards fall into your lap. This is the biggest problem with white—because its tribes are weak, it cannot compete with the extra power that tribal synergy gives all of the other colours. This is its biggest failing. However, we opened an *Oblivion Ring*, so we can either complain and lose or do something about it.

There's another semi-theme that works through white—albeit mainly through one card—and that's Giants. This means you will almost always be pairing the colour with red to take advantage of *Blind-Spot Giant* and *Lowland Oaf*. The card in the spotlight is the still-underestimated (mainly because no other archetype wants him) *Kithkin Greatheart*. The most important (not best) card in this archetype is *Avian Changeling*. Unfortunately, all white drafters correctly snap these up early, so they are hard to come by and you have to evaluate them accordingly. The reason the changeling is so good is because it helps to tie together all the loose tribal ends that white decks end up having. More importantly, it is the best Giant to follow up a *Greatheart* with and about the only good one to play on turn three.



If All Else Fails...

...You might want to think about actually drafting Kithkin.

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One of the problems with Kithkin is that they have no real overlap cards in other colours. Green has a few Kithkin but they don't really do anything specific to Kithkin and give no additional incentive to combine them. **Kithkin Mourncaller** is really not very good at all. The only other off-colour Kithkin enabler is **Quill-Slinger Boggart**, which is both great and easy to pick up if you happen to be in the unfortunate position of drafting white-black. This lack of cross-colour synergy is another of white's failings.

Another problem is that, for Limited, the Kithkin-specific cards don't really do that much. **Cenn's Heir** really needs other Kithkin to get him going and even then is far from spectacular; he seems to play the same role as **Frogmite** did for Affinity back in *Mirrodin*: he provides the weak but needed midgame overlap. **Surge of Thoughtweft** is probably the best reason to be Kithkin. This is a great and efficient trick that will often either net you card advantage or ruin a poor player. Pick it highly.

The only rare Kithkin-applicable card, and bear in mind that this is Limited and I almost never talk about rares, is **Thoughtweft Trio**. This guy doesn't even need to be in a deck with that many Kithkin as he's powerful enough to be played with as few as four or five Kithkin or, pushing the limits, just one **Kithkin Harbinger**.

Goldmeadow Stalwart and **Wizened Cenn** are the two uncommons of note, and they're not too exciting either. The Stalwart may be an early beater, but he's only a turn faster than a random **Grizzly Bears** and he will get outclassed quickly. The Cenn might be a **Crusade** on a stick, but he's a very fragile **Crusade**, one that dies to almost every removal spell in the set. It is important to note that Kithkins' strength is in speed, but everything has to come together nicely for that. You have to pick a Cenn or two and a Stalwart or two. Then you have to get all the, albeit late-pick, two-drops. Most importantly, though, you must have the removal.

To win with a fast deck in Limited, not only do you have to come out the gates at a blistering speed, meaning you will have to mulligan certain hands otherwise the deck will flounder, you have to be able to punch through the last few points of damage. To do this, you will need the crucial high-picked removal and you will need it at the right time, before it becomes too late and your opponent has stabilised. Unfortunately, everyone else is picking the removal, and the only good white removal is **Oblivion Ring**, which as already discussed, others are taking. This means you have to pair the Kithkin with another colour, normally red, and hope to pick up as much of their removal as possible.



The other unfortunate problem with Kithkin is easily shown if we look at a comparison from Constructed. The nemesis of fast aggro decks everywhere has always been the clunky midrange creature deck, often resembling The Rock. To bring this analogy back to Limited, almost every draft deck in the format tends to look like The Rock—packed with solid creatures that all generate some kind of card advantage if possible, with a splattering of removal. That is exactly what an aggro deck like Kithkin doesn't want to face.

The common pick order for drafting Kithkin goes as follows:

1. **Oblivion Ring**
2. Every other colour's cheap removal
3. **Goldmeadow Harrier**
4. **Plover Knights**
5. **Kinsbaile Balloonist**
6. **Surge of Thoughtweft**
7. **Neck Snap**

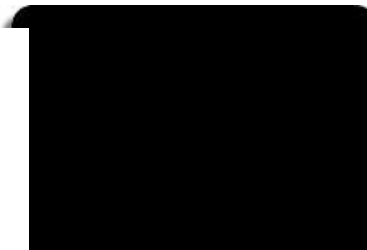
If you are already Kithkin, then **Wizened Cenn** goes right to the top of the list and the **Goldmeadow Stalwart** should get picked over **Plover Knights**. The easiest thing to notice about this pick order in comparison to every other colour or tribe is that it contains almost no theme cards. The Surge is a far cry from the power of **Lys Alana Huntmaster**, **Streambed Aquitects**, or **Silvergill Douser**.

One thing worth noting, which I haven't had much time to play with, is that you can draft incredibly fast white-green decks, using cards like **Nath's Elite** and **Plover Knights** as finishers and gaining **Fistful of Force** as another pump spell to go with **Surge of Thoughtweft** and **Triclopan Sight**. Again, though, I would much rather the deck be Elf-themed than populated by Kithkin, although if you really want to be this aggressive then cheap Kithkin like **Kinsbaile Skirmisher** and **Kithkin Daggerdare** are the way to go.

Draft Decisions

Let's see what happens in the subsequent picks once you've taken the **Oblivion Ring** you just cracked in a signal-free pack.

There are a few easy decisions we can make. If the second pack offers us a selection of a **Silvergill Douser** or a second Ring, we will begrudgingly take the Ring. If it offers us a **Plover Knights** or a **Silvergill Douser**, we take the Merfolk. **Goldmeadow Harrier** versus **Mulldrifter**, or versus a **Nameless Inversion** or a **Lash Out**, and white's second-best common loses out to all of them. If it offers **Cloudgoat Ranger** or a **Tarfire**, we take



the big Kithkin-lover. If it offers **Wizened Cenn** or **Lash Out**, however, we have a predicament.

After several drafts with Kithkin, I would now take the **Lash Out**, which is better for several reasons. It does not colour-commit us and both of our picks so far will have a high chance of making out final deck as they are easily splashed. You also do not want to tie yourself too intimately with white because it is probably the worst colour and the draft is still early and this is our first signal (if the rare was missing, it tells us nothing, and if it is a common missing, it could well be blue card or an Inversion).

Even if I will end up white, I hope that my other colour's theme would be more important than any loose affiliation to Kithkin and I definitely don't want to be so heavy white because I have this guy. This is almost enough to make me pick a **Plover Knights** over a **Wizened Cenn** following an O. Ring, but I'm not certain yet. I will try and avoid drafting Kithkin specifically as much as possible, so if I am presented with a valid option to do something else, I will do so.

Here are some fictional second picks to consider in the knowledge that you already have **Oblivion Ring**.



Scenario 1: Pack 1, Pick 2 (first pick was **Oblivion Ring**)

Warren Pilferers, Neck Snap, Streambed Aquitects, Pestermite, Dreamspoiler Witches, Lys Alana Huntmaster, Consuming Bonfire, Smokebraider, Kinsbaile Balloonist, Shimmering Grotto, Nath's Elite, Goldmeadow Stalwart, Elvish Harbinger, Knight of Meadowgrain

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Now this pack is obviously unrealistically good. It is also fairly even, which means that our pick will come down almost exclusively to colour choice. Unsurprisingly, given my dislike for white, this means it is very unlikely that one of the white cards will be taken. I think this is a pick between **Warren Pilferers**, **Streambed Aquitects**, **Lys Alana Huntmaster**, and **Elvish Harbinger**. The Pilferers is the card least likely to play the **Oblivion Ring** in the final deck, so I shall dismiss it. Both of the commons are great within their respective archetypes, and with the Ring already in the pocket, I would probably opt for the Merfolk because I think his tribe is better. However, Harbingers are very powerful. They let you tutor up removal and the bombs you wind up having in that archetype. The Elvish one is great in this respect too because it is a fixer to play the Ring off if we do not end up white, making it the pick here.

Pick: **Elvish Harbinger**

Scenario 2: Pack 1, Pick 2 (first pick was **Oblivion Ring**)

Wings of Velis Vel, Tarfire, Kinsbaile Balloonist, Peppersmoke, Judge of Currents, Sentinels of Glen Elendra, Goldmeadow Harrier, Weed Strangle, Fertile Ground, Leaf Gilder, Changeling Berserker, Crib Swap, Fallowsage, Wild Ricochet

Click [here](#).

Wild Ricochet, as attractive as it looks, is not a good card. This pack is once more filled with lots of goodies, although slightly weaker than before. **Judge of Currents** and **Fallowsage** represent the preferred Merfolk and **Tarfire** puts up the better showing for off-colour removal. We prefer fish to Faeries at this point with the Ring in our pocket (who wouldn't guess a ring?) so we can ignore the **Peppersmoke** and **Sentinels of Glen Endra**. The **Changeling Berserker** is nothing special, nor is the green showing. We know **Goldmeadow Harrier** is better than **Kinsbaile Balloonist**, but is it better than **Crib Swap**? I think so, because it is more splashable, can be tutored for by any Harbinger and deals with everything, no fuss asked.

I personally prefer **Judge of Currents** to the **Fallowsage**, which leaves us with the choice between **Tarfire**, **Judge of Currents**, and **Crib Swap**. Judge just isn't in the same league and can be discounted. **Crib Swap** is both on-colour and the more powerful card, so we can follow the Ring with a white card. It is very important to note that this doesn't make us white at all as it would be in my mind still to splash both.

Pick: **Crib Swap**

Scenario 3: Pack 1, Pick 3 (previous picks were **Oblivion Ring** and **Wizened Cenn**)

Now it is our third pick. We have first picked an **Oblivion Ring** and followed it up with a **Wizened Cenn**. For ease, we have had no difficult decisions and have sent no signals to the player on our left, nor have we received any from the player on the right as the rare was missing.

Lash Out, **Eyebright's Ending**, **Kinsbaile Balloonist**, **Stonybrook Angler**, **Whirlpool Whelm**, **Giant's Ire**, **Rootgrapple**, **Spellstutter Sprite**, **Cloudcrown Oak**, **Shimmering Grotto**, **Goldmeadow Stalwart**, **Boggart Harbinger**, **Drowner of Secrets**

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With the **Wizened Cenn** in the bag as well, the Stalwart is better than the Balloonist. I'm not completely positive, but I think the **Stonybrook Angler** is better than its uncommon brethren. Despite what I said earlier about Harbinger, we don't really want to pair black with white, the **Boggart Harbinger** is also one of the worst, and **Eyebright's Ending** is a better card anyway being efficient removal.

This leaves us with [Eyebright's Ending](#), [Stonybrook Angler](#), [Goldmeadow Stalwart](#), [Lash Out](#), or [Cloudbrown Oak](#). If we're looking at the nonwhite cards then it is clear that the [Lash Out](#) is the most powerful of the four, and there is the fact that red goes quite well with white. And then there were two. We've got what might be considered the nut set up for Kithkin so far with our first two picks so surely if there was ever a time to pick the Stalwart it should be now?

Nope. The [Lash Out](#) is still too powerful a card. Had our first picks been Douser and Aquitect and we were faced with the option of [Lash Out](#) or [Silvergill Adept](#), I would take the Merfolk—because their tribe is so much better and the Adept is more than an [Isamaru](#), [Hound of Konda](#). Kithkin are just not good enough to justifiably go all-in on. Were it a second [Wizened Cenn](#) rather than a Stalwart, I would go for it. That gives me enough power to take the plunge and start picking Kithkin over better cards because of their tribe.

Pick: [Lash Out](#)

In Limited, it is almost never the case that a colour is doomed, and white in Lorwyn certainly isn't that far down the line. It is a perfectly playable colour, because as people tend to favour the other colours, it goes underdrafted and you get rewarded with such goodies as a fifteenth pick [Kinsbaile Balloonist](#) (which actually happened in a draft I did yesterday, and which should, of course, never happen). For now, though, with the set still in early development draft-wise, I would veer away from white if the quality cards are not coming.

Taking this all in mind, what do you guys think of all of this? I've taken rather an extreme viewpoint, one that surely differs from many players. Are Kithkin, as an all-in tribal strategy, a lost cause? Am I completely off the mark? Have any of you developed a great way of drafting them, valuing cards differently to end up with a deck that continually terrorizes your local draft scene? Head to the forums and say so.

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*Widely considered one of the world's foremost Limited competitors, Quentin Martin has four Limited Grand Prix Top 8s and a Top 8 at Pro Tour–Prague 2006. Between his **Magic** expertise and a background in philosophy, it's no surprise Quentin is well known for his strategic insight and theories on the game.*



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