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It's been awhile since we've been able to talk about actual game play here in the column. Thankfully, Pro Tour–Kuala Lumpur is just around the corner and *Morningtide* packs have been plentiful, with many players from my local playgroup winning packs at the Prerelease. Combine that with multiple local players preparing for Kuala Lumpur and the fact that you only need one pack of the new set per player to draft and the drafts have been firing nearly every evening. There have been opportunities to wade into *Morningtide*—and for me to roll up my sleeves on the format while getting back to playing **Magic**.

Lorwyn-Lorwyn-Morningtide draft is the format of Pro Tour–Kuala Lumpur in just two weeks and this seemed like as good a time as any to peek ahead at how the new cards play with existing set and which cards will be fought over at the top tables.

White

I don't think any single *Lorwyn* tribe has benefited as much in *Morningtide* as Kithkin with four solid tribal commons lurking in the third pack. Burrenton Bombardiers is clearly the leader of the third pack as either a highly efficient flier or a brutal and uncounterable combat trick. It is hard to imagine anyone blocking a two-drop creature on the third turn if the Kithkin deck made its land drop. And the Kithkin deck is fine with whichever way the opponent sees fit to play it. If they want to block your creature—let's call it a Kinsbaile Skirmisher—then you will power up into a 4/4. If they let it through you can still just play your 2/2 flier.

The common Kithkin card that has been the most exciting for me so far has been the Ballyrush Banneret. Turn three with a Banneret is almost more exciting than the old LLL turn threes with a Smokebraider coming online. I have deployed six points of power in the form of three two-drop creatures, tucked the Banneret under a Thoughtweft Trio, or played Kithkin Greatheart alongside with Avian Changeling on turn three following a turn-two Banneret.

PRO TOUR COMMUNICATION

So the past two weeks have been a little rough. I have had to bite my virtual tongue while getting lambasted in the forums for being the bearer of bad news regarding changes to the Pro Tour. Fortunately for me and my ego, it looks like this column will no longer be the first place where that kind of information gets disseminated to the player base. Better yet, I will not have to be subject to the editorial constraints that come with delivering those messages.

Earlier this week, Wizards of the Coast sent an email to all players who received a Pro Point in 2007 and everyone who has an invitation to Kuala Lumpur—more than 1,700 players in all. Along with forging new direct communication lines, the email announced a players' Q&A session with Organized Play honchos Chris Galvin and Scott Larabee to be held at Kuala Lumpur at the end of Friday's rounds.

If you won't be in KL or can't attend the session, the email encouraged you to ask any questions you may have regarding the Pro Players Club to Scott Larabee (scott.larabee@wizards.com).

If you think you should have received that email and didn't, you should make sure your email address is up to date in the DCI database, and check your email program's spam filters.

Beyond those first two there is still plenty of white Kithkin commonality to choose from. The Order of the Golden Cricket is a fine beater and the Kithkin Zephyrnaut can be a semi-Serra Angel every couple of turns or so. Even the Mosquito Guard is a fine man that can serve the beats early on or provide the crucial extra boost you need mid-combat via reinforce. The question that I am looking forward to answering in Kuala Lumpur is "Where does Weight of Conscience fit into people's pick orders?" ...and Coordinated Barrage, for that matter.

I assume that Weight of Conscience will be like Oblivion Ring in the first two packs. Both cards are very effective removal for Elemental incarnations (although the Weight does nothing about a Planeswalker). While the white decks are happy to snap up the removal, so are the decks with enough color fixing to splash the non-tribally stamped card. While the Kithkin decks may first pick this, they will likely find that they can have their cake and eat it too: Non-Kithkin drafters will be shipping along the tribal cards and taking the white cards that Frank Karsten referred to as "artifacts" in a Tournament Center video piece from Worlds—that is, cards with no tribal commitment and easily splashable.

With so many excellent and efficient white commons in the third pack, I am expecting to see Kithkin stock rise significantly from the triple *Lorwyn* drafts at Worlds to the post-*Morningtide* drafts in Malaysia. Kithkin is the biggest beneficiary in that third pack but Elementals, Giants, and Merfolk all benefit as well.

The Stonybrook Schoolmaster makes the already formidable Merfolk decks that much more frustrating to play against. I watched my friend Kevin An do the seemingly impossible the other night. For as long as *Lorwyn* has been around, players have tried to lock up the game with a Wanderwine Prophets only to find they are unable to keep up with his cannibalistic demands. Kevin was able to keep his Prophet happy and well fed with the Schoolmaster—tapping it with Springleaf Drum to make a token—and islandwalking with Streambed Aquitects. Kevin's opponent could only sigh as the 5/5 took him apart from 20 with no chance to untap and take a turn between blows.

As for the uncommons, I don't think I have made any secret of my love for Overrun-type effects. While I would not pick Swell of Courage over Titan's Revenge, there is little else I would take over the white instant. The traditional argument against Overrun-type spells is that they can be dead cards if you control too few creatures when you draw it. Swell of Courage overcomes that obstacle by allowing you to Reinforce for X on one creature. I have already seen one game where a Swelled blocker took down a pair of attackers with the help of Cenn's Tactician—another pretty nifty uncommon for white.

Poor Meadowboon has rarely stuck around to see actual combat itsElf in the drafts I have done so far. I cannot actually recall an instance where someone has tapped mana in such a way as to allow him to stick around for a turn, preferring instead to evoke him as a one-time Ajani. Once you take the rares into account, roughly two-thirds of the white cards are very playable in Limited and could very well set off a fight for cards in the first two packs that likely lapped the table in drafts at Daytona and Worlds.



Blue

Of all the drafts I have done to date, I have the least experience with the blue cards—something very unusual for me. While blue was already popular in my local area thanks to Merfolk and Faeries, it has only gone up in people's estimation thanks to the subtyping of Rogue. I mentioned last week that I had seen a third-pick Nightshade Stinger at one draft, and while I can't prove it I suspect that one was drafted as high as first the other day to cut off the flow of Rogues. While I do like the black-red Rogue deck I find mysElf steering clear of blue and letting everyone else fight it out over the Rogues,

Faeries, and Merfolk. Dewdrop Spy and Latchkey Faerie are both part of a third-pack air force that is augmented by the Fencer Clique in the common slot.

Last week I questioned where Distant Melody should be positioned in the blue pick order and I have been shown the way by blue drafter extraordinaire Scott McCord, who happily played two copies of the card-drawing spell in his blue-black Faerie deck the other day and utterly buried everyone under his card advantage. I don't think you will find many people taking this card over the key creatures needed for their decks, but you will also not see it go all the way around the table very often and will likely see it splashed in decks with access to good mana fixing.

The Merfolk deck gets a mana accelerant in the form of the Stonybrook Banneret. I was going to write "a much-needed mana accelerant" but I am not sure that is true. The Merfolk decks have a grinding inevitability with Summon the School. The deck was already given a way to win faster with Swell of Courage. When the Merfolk deck only has to pay three mana for Summon the School it can make facing off against it feel like an exercise in futility.

There are a couple of one-drops that straddle the Merfolk and Rogue strategies (Merrow Whisperer and the shapeshifting Mothdust Changeling), but overall the blue commons don't hit me with the wow factor of the white ones. Now, the rares and uncommons on the other hand....

Herman Lee is a Neutral Ground regular who has become a pretty formidable drafter over the past few sets and he has opened my eyes to a number of cards in *Morningtide* including a thrashing he handed me with a deck featuring a pair of Sage of Fables. A mid-combat Spellstutter Sprite came down as a 3/3. When I used a combat trick to attempt to kill it, Herman drew two cards and bounced it with Whirlpool Whelm. I had a similar experience attacking into the rarely played Ringskipper—he made Herman's cut thanks to being a Wizard, learn your class types now—which drew him a couple of cards and then returned to hand when he won the clash. All in all it was one of the most crushing defeats I have ever been handed.

The card I am going to be on the lookout for in Malaysia is Notorious Throng. I have only drafted it once and never had a chance to play it, but it strikes me as being absolutely ludicrous if you can pay the prowl cost and only downright unfair if you pay the regular casting cost. It is not hard to imagine situations where paying four mana for this results in three to four Faerie tokens shortly followed by a game win. Another prowly rare that is sure to make for good coverage stories is Knowledge Exploitation, although I have not seen this happen yet.



My one blue draft with the set so far saw me return to my *Lorwyn* roots with a blue-red Elementals deck that started with Mulldrifter, two Aethersnipes, and a Smokebraider and no idea how Elementals would pan out in the third set. I was passed a Slithermuse—after opening Pyroclast Consul—and ended up very happy with the results. I went 3-0 and the extra cards drawn by bouncing, evoking, and championing my Slithermuse played a very large role in those victories. This one definitely lives up to its advance billing.

Black

My most efficient game with the new set came on the surprisingly broad shoulders of the Prickly Boggart which allowed me to Noggin Whack an opponent on turn two and pillage his deck on turn three with an Earwig Squad. When he played out a second creature on turn four he double blocked the 5/3 but could not stop the fear guy from poking him for another point. That simply allowed me to regrow the Squad with Boggart Birtright and take another three cards.

Speaking of the Earwig Squad, there was apparently a match involving Pro Tour–San Diego winner Chris Lachmann where he hit his opponent with the Squad on turn three and noticed three Swamps in his opponent's deck and no black spells to be found. He realized that his opponent was holding all his black cards but had not drawn any of the mana.

Pick up your own Earwig Squad at a Launch Party this weekend (while supplies last).



Stories of early pick Rogues and Earwig Squads aside, you are looking for removal in black and there is plenty to be found. Festercreep single-handedly takes out entire archetypes from Merfolk to elves to flying Rogues and will fill in for the missing pack of Hurly-Burly for everyone's sideboard. Violet Pall is the top of the class of removal spells, sometimes allowing you to two-for-one your opponent in mid combat, and despite being tribally stamped should show up in many an otherwise nonblack / non-Faerie deck. You should not be expecting to see this card go around the table any more than you will an Eyeblight's Ending. Despite costing two more mana, it may even go a little higher as it will be the last pack that anyone can pick up removal and price will not be as much of an issue.

Weed-Pruner Poplar is a card that has continually crept up in people's pick orders as we get more drafts under our belts. Backed up by a little removal, this card can dominate the board against a number of the popular archetypes, shoot down Sunflare Shamans, Latchkey Faeries, and Silvergill Dousters, or keeping them off the board until the opponent can find a way to deal with it.

Pack's Disdain is another card in the cycle that spawned Distant Melody and comes with some of the same problems as the blue card-drawer, but the price is right at two mana at instant speed. Keep in mind that your opponent has some control over how this card will play out since they can respond by bouncing, killing, or removing creature types from your creatures before this resolves.

Another tricky removal spell is Warren Weirding in the uncommon spot. Obviously less than ideal against a Goblin deck, it also has trouble against decks with a lot of changelings. Despite that, I have found this card to be much better than most players' first impressions, especially when you have other removal in the deck and can exert some control over your opponent's decision. While black-red Goblins was a popular LLL archetype I have seen mismatched red-black decks built around removal first, shapeshifters second, and whatever they can find to fill in the rest perform quite well in this new draft format thanks to common shapeshifters in both black and red in *Morningtide*.

Bitterblossom is easily the most insane black rare you can open and although it does not seem like it is easily splashed in non-black decks (as you do want to play this when you are low on life), I have no

trouble imagining this as the only black card in a winning draft deck. This card has already been talked about as a Constructed powerhouse, and starting Friday you can start playing with it in sanctioned Constructed events. While there are no PTQs this weekend while the **Magic** community gears up for the Launch Party tournaments, players will have one week before they have to start taking *Morningtide* into account at the PTQ level.

I will wrap up my look at *Morningtide* Limited next week. Good luck to everyone playing with the new cards this weekend and most importantly, have fun.

Friday Night Foil

Are your old-school or timeshifted Tormod's Crypts just not getting the job done? Think about upgrading, starting this weekend at Friday Night **Magic**. [Click here!](#)

Firestarter: Can Dredge be Stopped?

February's FNM foil presents one solution to the problem of Dredge, which has emerged as one of the top decks this Extended PTQ season for Hollywood. Is Dredge the best deck in the format? Or did the lack of solid results from Valencia just lull players into a false sense of security and not devote enough sideboard cards to the blazingly fast combo deck? Head to the forums and share your thoughts!

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