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Ah, the Spirit World. For the past two sets, its denizens have been manifesting themselves on the material plane as creepy-looking creatures with strange glowing objects floating around them.

Now, with the release of *Saviors of Kamigawa* looming, we see that some Spirits can manifest themselves in other ways, mimicking spell-like effects. Behold:





Now THAT is a green creature—a giant 5/5 body for five mana with no drawbacks, and a relevant in-play ability. But the cool part of Arashi is his “Channel” effect, which essentially reads, “♣♣♣: Meloku and all his token and Magpie buddies die, and no you can't counter this.”

Channel No. 5

Let's go over the Channel ability, shall we? First of all, it's not a keyword *per se* in that it has no reminder text, it is in italics, and it won't get an entry into the Comprehensive Rules. So what in the heck is it then?

Astute readers will remember an article of mine from the time of *Unhinged* previews, “The Spoken Word”. That article explained that *Unhinged's* “Gotcha” mechanic wasn't really a keyword, but rather an “official nickname” that we put on the cards to link them together. And in the very last sentence of the article, I said we'd be introducing “pseudo-keywords” later on in the Kamigawa block. Mark Gottlieb showed you “Sweep” in his Barrel Down Sokenzan preview on Tuesday, and you get to see “Channel” here.

Channel isn't really a keyword because once you spell out the cost of using the ability (pay mana + discard this card) and then list the effect, there's no need for any kind of reminder text. It's all right there! So instead of mucking up the wording just to get it into a more standardized keyword format—something like “Channel  (You may discard this card and pay  to get the Channel effect.)”—we decided to keep it simple. The card uses well-known understandable wording, and just has a little pseudo-keyword tacked on at the beginning.

Channel — , Discard Arashi:
Arashi deals X damage to each creature with flying.

Sweep — Return any number of Mountains you control to their owner's hand. Barrel Down Sokenzan deals damage to target creature equal to twice the number of Mountains returned this way.

Gotcha — Whenever an opponent says “Spell” or “Counter,” you may say “Gotcha!” If you do, return Spell Counter from your graveyard to your hand.

The burning question seems to be, “Why 'keyword' these abilities at all?” The answer is for ease of communication. It's easier to talk about and understand cards as a group if there is some verbal link that ties them together. Sometimes the link is in the cards' names—if I say “Shoal,” you immediately know that I'm talking about an X-pitch card from *Betrayers*. Sometimes the link is in creature type—the word “Moonfolk” should evoke images of blue fliers with abilities that require you to return lands to their owners' hands. Sometimes it is in a “regular” keyword—“Soulshift” lets you know the creature in question is (most likely) a Spirit that can regrow one of its fallen kindred when it dies. And now with our “pseudo-keyword” technology, there is another way to verbally link cards together. “A creature with 'Channel'” is a lot easier to say than “one of those creatures that you can discard like an instant.”

We regret not labeling “Spiritcraft” in such a way in *Champions*. Better late than never.

Basic Channel

A few things to remember about Channel:

- It is an activated ability playable while the card is in your hand. Damping Matrix will not stop you from using it, though, because it is a “creature card” while in your hand, not a creature. (But if we ever printed some kind of artifact that stopped activated abilities of *cards* from being played, it would stop Channel.)
- You can use the Channel ability any time you could play an instant. Since it is not a spell, counterspells will not work against Channel except for that rascally Stifle.
- Many of the Channel abilities in the set are targeted. You cannot activate a targeted Channel ability without a legal target.
- The ability really has nothing to do with the Alpha card Channel.

Channel's best friend is Soulshift. It's great to be able to Hurricane once, Soulshift Arashi back to your hand, and then either Hurricane again or play him out as a 5/5. If you want to surprise your opponent by using Channel in response to him killing one of your Sprits with Soulshift, you'll have to play the Channel ability before the Soulshifting Spirit is actually put into your graveyard (such as in response to the Rend Spirit your opponent plays). Once the Soulshifter actually hits the 'yard, you have to choose a target immediately to bring back; it will be too late to discard a Channel guy with hopes of pulling him back for reuse.

If any of this sounds confusing, talk to one of your area judges at the Prerelease this weekend, or bombard my man Carter with some emails.

Developing the Sky Asunder

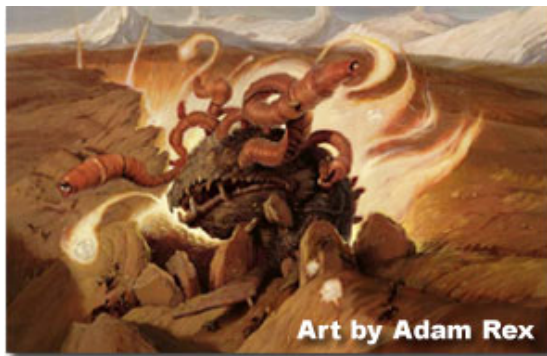
Arashi was designed with a brother-in-arms, a red Legendary Spirit named Jiwari, the Earth Aflame (not to be confused with the *Ninth Edition* theme deck “World Aflame”

Anyone with a reasonable knowledge of the “color pie” can predict what Jiwari's ability is—his ability and Arashi's have been a classic red-green mirror since the game's inception. For a long time during development, the two cards had exactly the same mana cost, activation cost, power and toughness.

Nice symmetry, sure, but why was green getting the short end of the stick?

While mirrors of one another, Jiwari was just better. His ability was more relevant, and he fit better into red decks than Arashi did in green ones. But isn't green supposed to get the best big creatures?

The fact that Arc-Slogger and Kumano are better than almost every green creature really bugs many of us here in R&D, so we took it out on this pair of Spirits. Arashi got bigger and cheaper to use, and Jiwari got smaller. Don't get me wrong, Jiwari is still an excellent card that I expect to see lots of play, but it is now clear that Arashi is the bruiser in the family.



You can get your hands on both of them at the same time as part of the *Saviors'* "Spirit Fire" theme deck and decide for yourself who's better.

Until then, though, enjoy Channel at the Prerelease, and may you open Arashi and smash face with him.

Last Week's Poll:

What is the most money you've ever spent on a single Magic card (in US dollars)?		
\$5.01-\$10.00	3884	18.3%
\$10.01-\$15.00	3223	15.2%
\$15.01-\$20.00	2906	13.7%
\$20.01-\$30.00	2412	11.3%
\$2.01-\$5.00	2109	9.9%
I've never purchased a single card.	1359	6.4%
\$30.01-\$50.00	1181	5.6%
\$50.01-\$100.00	911	4.3%
\$200.01-\$500.00	692	3.3%
\$100.01-\$200.00	673	3.2%
\$1.00-\$2.00	580	2.7%
>\$1,000.00	535	2.5%
<\$1.00	454	2.1%
\$500.01-\$1,000.00	339	1.6%
Total	21258	100.0%

This Week's Poll:

Now that you've had several months to play with the "new Legend rule," how do you like it?

Better than the old one.

Worse than the old one.

The same/no opinion.

