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Plenty of Time

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 Making Magic
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

Welcome to the third week of *Time Spiral* previews! This will be the last week of previews as the prerelease is this Saturday and Sunday (September 23 & 24 - [click here for info](#)). If you at all have the chance to make it to this prerelease, I strongly urge you to try. Like Scott Johns said [in his article last week](#), I think this prerelease is going to be very memorable and probably one for the record books. I know I'll be there. (Players in Seattle – feel free to say hi.) I've been getting a lot of mail about *Time Spiral* and promise that next week I'll get to the topic that's generated the most mail. But enough of next week, let's focus on finishing out my previews with even more juicy tidbits about *Time Spiral* design.

Making Time

[When last we talked](#), I explained how the design team chose to interweave a nostalgia theme with a time motif. I even explained how we came up with the major new mechanic, suspend, which played directly into using time as a resource. But suspend was just the tip of the temporal iceberg. Time, mechanically speaking, is used in many ways throughout *Time Spiral*. In today's column, I'm going to walk you through many of them. Sound good? Well, then let's start. Time's a wastin'.

Split Second

Time Spiral has eight returning keywords plus Suspend. What else does it need? More keywords. Two to be exact (although one of them is more of a formal naming of something we already do). The other is something new with the flavor of something old. And yes, for those capable of reading the header, that mechanic is called split second. What does it do? I'm glad you asked, because I have a preview card to show off with this very mechanic. (What were the odds?) Before I start talking about it, let's see it in all its glory.

[Click here](#) to see the preview card.

Final Wrap-up
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I guess I should start by explaining what exactly split second means. As with suspend, I'm going to give you the brief, conversational explanation here and include the nuts and bolts, technical wording at the column's end. What does split second do? Basically, it says while this spell is on the stack, no one else may put anything else on the stack. This means that split second spells will pretty much do what they do without any interference.

There are a few exceptions. One, mana abilities can still be played. (The game doesn't seem to like it when we try to stop mana abilities.) Two, triggered abilities can still trigger. And three, special actions (the most important one being "unmorphing" a creature) can still be used.

What value does split second have? Several. First, because players cannot respond to a split second spell, you are able to do things you might not normally be able to do. For instance: It's very hard to destroy a **Blinking Spirit**, but Sudden Death can. When your opponent starts to say, "In response to your spell, I'll return **Blinking Spirit** to my hand," you get to reply with, "Uh, no."

Neither **Bottle Gnomes** nor **Spike Feeder** will gain anyone any life if killed this way. Neither **Mogg Fanatic** nor Tim (**Prodigal Sorcerer**) will ping something. None of those annoying I'll-just-use-its-ability-right-before-it's-going-to-die-anyway permanents (okay, other than the morph guys) gets to do their thing. And we knew this when we designed the split second cards, so expect to see some cards that will finally let you do some things to these guys you could never really do before.

But that's not all. Order now and you'll get an entire group of cards that cannot be messed with. If Sudden Death wants to destroy a creature with toughness four or less, no **Giant Growth** is going to stop it. No **Shunt** is going to make you destroy one of your creatures instead. And nobody is going to counter it. Those pesky blue mages can't stop something they can't respond to.

Now that I've explained what split second is, the next question is where did it come from? Not *Time Spiral* design. In fact, the mechanic was added in during development. That said, it did come from design, just not *Time Spiral* design. The idea originally came up during *Guildpact* design. While thinking about how the Izzet might mess with instants and sorceries, the team batted this idea around. Devin (Low) liked the idea enough to bring it back up during *Coldsnap* design. (Devin, like Aaron, was on both *Guildpact* and *Coldsnap* design teams.)

The *Coldsnap* design team (Devin, Aaron, Bill Rose and myself) responded positively to it for two reasons. First, because it's a good mechanic. And second, we liked how it had a nostalgic feel, as it seemed reminiscent of interrupts. (You see, my newer readers – **Magic** didn't always have just six card types.) So we put it into *Coldsnap*.

Meanwhile, the *Time Spiral* development team had killed one of design's original mechanics (more on this on another day) and was looking for a replacement. The moment they heard about split second (then called superfast), a nostalgic-feeling time-related mechanic, they asked if they could steal it from *Coldsnap*. As it was obviously a better fit in *Time Spiral*, the *Coldsnap* team gave it up without a fight. (For those that are struggling with the timing of all of this, you need to know that large sets start earlier than small sets, as they require a lot more work. This is why *Coldsnap* design and *Time Spiral* development overlapped, even though the former was published first.)

The other nice fit was that suspend had a flavor of time slowing down, while split second had the flavor of time speeding up. The two offered a nice balance, which is the kind of thing you look for in your two, new major mechanics.



From a mechanical standpoint, I really like how the existence of it forces players to completely reevaluate when they want to do something. No longer do you just have the luxury to wait until your hand is forced. With split second, you might lose your chance if you don't use it at the right time. The designers love to throw monkey wrenches into conventional playing wisdom. No longer will "just wait" always be the correct answer.

Flash

On the first day of previews, Rei Nakasawa previewed Teferi in [his feature article](#). To refresh your memory (because I know all of you read every word printed here at [magicthegathering.com](#)), here he is in all his glory:



I've chosen to show off Teferi because he happens to sport the third new *Time Spiral* keyword: flash. All right, new might be a bit of a stretch. Flash is us finally getting around to keywording the "you may play CARDNAME anytime you could play an instant" text. While it's mostly used on creatures, you'll see it showing up on other card types.

Why did we choose to finally keyword it? Good question with (luckily) a good story. Back when we first started working on *Time Spiral* (at the time called *Snap*), I was looking for things that had a time flavor that were already part of the game. One area I started exploring was spells that were played at a time that they are not normally played. This led me to the "play anytime you could play an instant" cards.

My first proposal was a little more radical than a keyword. I wanted to create cards that were both a permanent and an instant. You know, Instant Creature, Instant Enchantment, Instant Artifact – that kind of thing. The cards are actually written this way in early *Time Spiral* playtest cards. What happened? My arch-nemesis – Mark Gottlieb or as he's better known, The Rules Manager - appeared.

Somehow combining permanent and non-permanent types causes a disruption in the Space-Time Continuum that may doom all mankind. Note the "may". I'm a risk taker by nature so I was okay with giving it a shot, but the Rules Manager would not hear of it. I fought the law and the law won. You know, if you replace the word "law" with "super villain".

"Okay," I said, "How do we do this without fundamentally eroding the very foundation of the rules?"

To which Mark (Gottlieb – I tend not to talk about myself in the third person when I'm not writing bios) answered, "We'll keyword it."

My reply: "Good. *Time Spiral* is definitely in need of keywords."

The last funny story about flash had to do with the naming of the keyword. In design, we had called it surprise. The creative team wasn't too keen on the connotations of the word surprise. They liked better something that conveyed speed. (For some reason "haste" didn't really work out.)



The problem was that our goals for the name were a bit complex. For starters, the name had to imply speed. Second, we wanted a verb so that you could describe how you were playing your card with the keyword. (“I’ll VERB my King Cheetah into play.”) Third, we wanted a noun so that we could talk about it on cards in a way that sounded grammatically correct. (“All creature cards in your hand gain flash.”) Fourth, it had to have a nice simple name, as this is a mechanic that can show up in the basic set and many expert expansions. Yes, all we needed was a word that was simple, both a noun and a verb, and implied speed.

Matt Cavotta made an extensive list of all the words that fit the criteria and we ended up with flash. (It was a short list.) Everyone liked it, except there was one small problem. *Time*

Spiral was bringing back old mechanics. One of them was flashback. Could the same set handle flash and flashback? The two aren’t even related mechanically. We went back and forth and looked at many names, but none of them worked as well as flash. (Flash was even a card in *Mirage* that worked similarly – although ironically, Flash doesn’t technically give a creature card flash.) In the end, we decided that having the better word for all **Magic** history trumped the having two keywords sound too close in a single set.

And thus does my plan to name as many keyword mechanics after superheroes begin to flourish. (C’mon, who doesn’t want to play the hulk mechanic?)

Using The Game’s Natural Resources

Once I started on my search to find mechanics that were already part of **Magic** that had a time feel, I couldn’t stop with flash. Here are a few I found:

Haste – The mechanics that have the most time feel are the ones that seem to speed up or slow down the game in some regard. Haste is a perfect example of the former. Creatures with haste just skip ahead a turn right to the attack. Realizing this, we made sure to have haste appear more than normal. A big help to this goal was the fact that all the creatures with suspend come into play with haste.

Comes into play tapped – If haste speeds things up, “comes into play tapped” slows them down. The best part about this mechanic is that it’s simple, but has some nice play ramifications. Also, as the effect happens when you play it, there are no memory issues.

Returning permanents back to owner’s hands – This is another area that feels very “timey” as it appears to reverse time. Things one player does get undone. Unfortunately, bounce effects do not play nicely with suspend. There is little frustration like waiting four turns to have your suspend creature come into play only to watch it return to the hand to start all over again. As such, bounce spells are lower than normal in this set, and some of the ones we did include can only affect your stuff.

Flashback – When we first started thinking about what mechanics to bring back, I tried to think where old mechanics belonged in the past, present, future model. The most past-related mechanic I could think of was flashback. The name even refers to harkening back to the past. This mechanic lets you play spells you’ve already played. In the past. Anyway, when you go to the prerelease and see the cards for the first time, you might notice that common has a cycle of flashback cards. Because I felt flashback had the best “past” feel, I put it in at a lower rarity so it would show up more.

Thallids – When I explain about using time as a resource, I keep talking about how we’ve only touched upon it a little in the past. “A little” does at least include one mechanic – thallids. Every third turn, you get something. If you can keep the game going long enough, your position grows stronger and stronger. In fact, no mechanic better marries nostalgia with “time as a resource” than thallids. Welcome back!



Time as a Marker

The last big catch-all is best summed up by a card previewed two weeks back by Mike Flores. (And by the way, this card does *not* suck.)



This card demonstrates that there are other ways to use time mechanically. Serra Avenger tells you when you can and cannot play it. Other cards can only affect things that were done at a certain time. Some cards reward you based on when you play it. (There's a whole cycle of these.) The key here is that time is a flexible concept that weaves its way into many aspects of the game. *Time Spiral* peeks into some of these nooks and crannies to make cards that work a bit differently than other sets.

We're Out Of Time

And with that, I officially wrap up my part of the *Time Spiral* previews. Don't worry, I still have plenty *Time Spiral* goodies to share with you; I'll just do so after you all have had a chance to see everything. Trust me, with all the Easter eggs in this set, I know you won't see everything even once you've seen everything.

Join me next week when I explore yet another facet of *Time Spiral*.

Until then, may you build great memories that will become future nostalgia (hint: [prerelease this weekend](#)).

Mark Rosewater

The Great Designer Search Update

I promised I'd keep you up to date, so here's where things stand right now. 136 applicants scored high enough on the round two multiple choice test (you needed 30 out of 35 to pass – an 85% score; interestingly, no one scored a perfect score, and all the top scorers missed different questions) to advance to the third round. Last Thursday, we sent a card design test to these 136 applicants giving them until midnight Sunday to turn it in.

It will take us a couple of weeks to sort through all the tests to narrow down the field to the small number that will participate on the "reality show". As I said before, we are planning for The Great Designer Search show (it will be a weekly feature) to begin sometime in October. I know I'm quite excited for it all to begin.

Oh Yeah

And finally, before I go, I guess I should give you all the technical stuff I promised for flash and split second.

[Here you go](#). Enjoy!

Mark Rosewater is Head **Magic** Designer. What this fancy title means is that he's in charge of **Magic** design. This gets him a lot of mail (which he actually reads). When not alternatively destroying and saving **Magic**, he likes to

spend time with his family, do stereotypically geeky things (play games, read comics, watch a lot of science fiction, etc.) and write about himself in third person.



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