

Everything you need to know in order to compete in this weekend's *Time Spiral* prerelease.

***Time Spiral* Prerelease Primer**

Brian David-Marshall

Monday, September 18, 2006

- 
- 



- **Brian David-Marshall Archive**

I have to admit I was stubborn at first. I love playing *Ravnica* block Limited and I was not prepared to stop for anything – not even the next set. Besides, what could those fiends inside of R&D possibly top the crazy 5-color goodness that is RGD Limited?

How about the return of some beloved friends, favorite themes, tantalizing keywords, as well as the addition of plenty of new themes, ideas, and keywords? Welcome to the *Time Spiral*. Don't try and fight it... just let yourself be pulled into the vortex.

There is no better time or place to start than at [your local \(and sometimes not-so-local\) Prerelease tournament](#). I do one of these Prerelease Primers for each set and if you have read one of these before, you can probably just run the ol' CTRL-F for the word "shadow" and you will see the preview card. If you have not played at a Prerelease before, you can still just skip ahead, but don't forget to scroll back up. I will try and walk you through the experience of going to one of these exciting tournaments for the first time.

Time Spiral includes a bevy of old creature types, mechanics, keywords, and themes that have appeared in sets going all the way back to the original Alpha edition. This may be a daunting prospect for a newer player who doesn't know Echo from Buyback, or an original [Wheel of Fortune](#) from a fixed [Black Lotus](#).

Do not be alarmed. First of all, while some older players like myself have seen and played with all of these mechanics before, most players will have not played with all of them. Even the ones with experience in the old mechanics will not have seen them in some time. I know that I often jettison old card names and abilities from my limited mental storage area to make room for shiny new information all the time.



Thankfully, you can find a handy-dandy new rules primer that covers the information you will need for the event. Called the *Time Spiral* rules primer, it's located [here](#) and went live the same time as my article. Even better than that, everyone's favorite evil genius Mark Gottlieb has an article going up as part of the [minisite](#) on Wednesday which is a more digestible version and probably has some extra information as well.

The rules primer also has some rule reversals that are worth taking note of. If I am not mistaken, the rules change on cards with no printed casting cost means that I can now imprint **Evermind** on **Isochron Scepter** as **Armageddon** on a stick with a **Celestial Kirin** in play. But that is an article for another day, another format. The topic for today is *Time Spiral* Limited over the Prerelease weekend.

The first chance that anyone will have to get their mitts on the new set will be at Midnight Madness events. Not every tournament organizer runs these events, but those that do swing their doors wide open to run the first tournament of the weekend at Midnight on Friday as soon as the calendar page turns to Saturday.

Whether you play in the Midnight tournaments or wait until Saturday morning, you will need to get yourself registered with the DCI in order to play – if you have never played in a real life tournament before. There is no fee associated with joining the DCI, the only thing it will cost you is the couple of minutes it takes to fill out the form with your pertinent data. Once you have the PIN, you will be all set to not only play in the Prerelease tournaments as well as Friday Night **Magic**, Pro Tour Qualifiers, and any other organized play event that falls under the Wizards of the Coast umbrella. It should be pointed out that if you have a DCI number from playing in another Wizards tournament like **Duel Masters** or **Dreamblade**, you are all set for this weekend.

For those of you signing up for a DCI number for the very first time, you don't have to do anything before you attend the tournament. The organizer will have plenty of blank forms available. I recommend that if you are playing in your first tournament – or for that matter if you are returning to the tournament scene after a protracted absence – that you seek out the Tournament Organizer and introduce yourself. Explain that you are a new player. TO's are always on the lookout for new customers – and returning old customers – and will likely pay some extra attention to you. Not only

can they give you the lay of the land, but also they may be able to introduce you to some of the players in your area who have a history of mentorship and are active community builders.

Assuming you have the patience to wait until Saturday morning (or Saturday afternoon) to play in the Prerelease, you will likely be faced with two options. Many sites offer a bigger prize main event that has a specific start time and will accept as many entrants as sign up. This event is played out like a regular Sealed Deck tournament with the number of rounds being determined by the number of players. The reward is much higher, but if you are new to the tournament scene, you may want to steer clear of this event because it attracts a more competitive breed of local magician than the alternative.

All weekend long tournament organizers will be running "flights". These are tournaments with a fixed number of participants – 16 or 32 usually – and a fixed number of rounds – 4 or 5. At the end of the tournament, everyone with a X-0, X-0-1, or X-1 record receives *Time Spiral* boosters as their prize. This tournament attracts a more casual player base than the Main Event, and with its deeper and flatter prize payout, is far more likely to reward you for your time with some additional bounty.

One of the other nice things about "flights" is that they are run on demand. As soon as one fills up they start. This means the tournaments are running all day and you can bend the tournament to your schedule as opposed to the traditional breakneck drive to reach the venue in time for the first round. It also means that you can play in more than one event – although not at the same time. Once you are done with one flight, you are free to queue up for another.

Whenever you sign up for a tournament, you also receive a commemorative Prerelease foil rare. Traditionally the promo card is a creature, but Aaron has already revealed in his column that this weekend's participants will all be the proud owners of an alternate artwork Lotus Bloom.

You don't get to use the promo card in you Sealed deck, but whichever style of Sealed Deck event you choose to play in, you will be working with the same basic materials: one Tournament Pack and two booster packs of *Time Spiral*, still warm from the oven. From these cards you will be asked to create a deck of no fewer than forty cards. This is the point in the primer when I implore you to try not to play any more than forty (although I can be convinced to look the other way on the occasional foray into the land of forty-one).

The important thing to keep in mind about this new format is that we are returning to a world of five colors and not ten guilds. You can no longer splash two off colors in your deck. As a quick deck building guideline (I recommend that you pore over the [Limited Information](#) archives for a more in depth analysis of building a Sealed Deck), you should be looking at a mix of cards that has between 15 and 18 creatures, 5 and 8 spells with an emphasis on creature kill, and at the very least 17 land.

Try and keep your cards to within two colors with one of those colors being either red or black, as they almost always will be the colors that allow you to kill enemy critters. If you cannot



support either color as a main color, then you can splash a removal color. Make sure you have enough mana sources of that color to be able to cast your spells. If you have two important red removal spells (which I am assuming each have only require a single 🍷 to be a part of the casting cost), you probably want three red sources and certainly not fewer than two. You do not want to splash a card with a double color specific casting cost in your third color.

One of the biggest mistakes that I see new players make at a Prerelease is an over emphasis on early creature drops, especially one-mana creatures. Unless a one-drop has a really good ability, or there is some synergy like Bloodthirst to exploit, you don't want to devote much of your deck to anything smaller than a 2/2 for two mana. Sealed Deck is a slower format than Constructed or Booster Draft and if you play enough land in the right colors, you will have time to develop your board and play bigger and better creatures as the game progresses.

If you can stick to forty cards, two colors or two main colors and a third splashed color, play at least fifteen creatures that are spread out over your casting costs from two mana up to your dragon-sized monsters. Round out your spells with efficient removal cards and card drawing, and play seventeen lands (even eighteen is perfectly acceptable), and you will be halfway there to winning some packs.

The only way you are going to get the rest of the way there is to actually play in the tournament. The rules of thumb I presented in the above paragraph are by no means hard and fast, but if you don't have much experience playing Sealed Deck, they will serve you well.

One of the other things you want to keep an eye out for when deciding what colors to play is evasion. Traditionally evasion comes in the form of flying, but for this block we have already seen the return of an old form of evasion – Shadow. [Here is an example of a common card you will undoubtedly have the opportunity to play with and against this weekend.](#)



This is a great creature. Two-mana, one-power fliers are a staple in Sealed formats and this is essentially the same thing. The big difference here is that you will get to rip through your deck while whittling down your opponent's life total. It is not quite as exciting as the "draw a card"-goodness of [Ohran Viper](#) or [Shadowmage Infiltrator](#), but card selection is the next best thing to card advantage. This is a must play if you are blue and a must kill creature if you see it across the table. Shadow was tough enough to deal with the first time around when there was a lot of it. With so many themes and mechanics winding their way back into this set, I cannot imagine that Shadow is so prevalent that this card is not simply unblockable a good deal of the time.

Once you have decided to attend the Prerelease and have determined who is running one in your area, I strongly suggest you visit that organizer's website and see what special treats they have in store. Many organizers (Professional Events, Star City Events, Gray Matter Conventions) take the time to fly in artists for the weekend and you may want to have some cards on hand to get them signed. Not all organizers run Midnight Madness events, while others run their events all weekend long from Friday at Midnight until the last packs are doled out in the wee hours of Sunday.

There are also other formats to play in besides straight-up Sealed Deck. Almost every organizer will be offering Two-Headed Giant Sealed – an increasingly relevant format – and if you are looking to play with a friend, this is the perfect time. It is also an ideal format if you are looking to introduce someone to **Magic** or are looking to have a more experienced friend mentor you in the game's fine points. One head makes the final decision on everything, which is the ideal situation for walking a newer player through the finer points of the game. Again, check your local TO's website for more details about start times and entry fees.



Whatever you decide to do this weekend, make sure **Some heads are prettier than others.** you play enough lands, don't go over forty/forty-one cards, and most importantly, have fun. Many of my favorite themes and mechanics, from Slivers and Flanking to Echo and Buyback, are returning in this set. I hope you enjoy them this weekend as much as I did when they were first released. I will be in Seattle on Saturday for the Prerelease. If you are in the area, I hope you will come by and say hello, show me your deck, and maybe even play a game or three.