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# Fungus Among Us

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Latest Developments  
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Surprise! Aaron is out of the office this week, so I'm jumping in to guest-write this week's column like a literary *Ninja of the Deep Hours*. Is it because I co-designed and co-developed *Time Spiral*, just like Aaron? Is it because my *Guildpact* and *Coldsnap* articles became runaway bestsellers? Or is it just because I couldn't resist the chance to write about our final *Time Spiral* preview card? You could scroll down to the card right now, but first let me take you on a little journey.

## Pummel the Goldfish

Our journey begins with this brain-bending puzzle:

Say your starting hand is *City of Brass* and exactly one other card. You have no deck, and nobody loses to having an empty library. Your opponent, Goldie the Goldfish, has no cards in hand, no permanents, no deck, and 22 life. No word tricks there – the Goldfish does nothing but blow bubbles and take damage. Your mystery card can be any (non-*Unhinged/Unglued*) **Magic** card of your choice. What card in all of **Magic** would you pick to deal 22 damage to Goldie as quickly and reliably as possible?

Guess 1:

Lion, Pup and friends



Good first try. A first turn two-power creature deals 20 damage on your turn 11 and 22 damage on your turn 12. Efficient, but you can do better.

Guess 2:

Mana Clash





Another good guess. **Mana Clash** *might* win the game on turn 1... but not very reliably.

Guess 3:

**Roc Hatchling**



If you guessed this obscure card, you are pretty damn clever. **Roc Hatchling** "hatches" and attacks on turn 5 for 3 damage, deals 21 damage by turn 11, and deals 24 damage on turn 12. **Roc Hatchling** deals more damage than **Savannah Lions** by turns 11 and 12, but you can do even better. Think – what's the most devastating single-card single-mana army in all of Vintage **Magic**?

The Answer:

**Thallid**



Betcha didn't guess this little beater! Let's take a look:

Turn 1: Play **Thallid**

Turn 4: Have dealt 3 damage. Make a 1/1 Saproling. Start dealing 2 a turn.

Turn 7: Have dealt 9 damage. Make a 1/1 Saproling. Start dealing 3 a turn.

Turn 10: Have dealt 18 damage. Make a 1/1 Saproling. Start dealing 4 a turn.

Turn 11: Have dealt 22 damage. Sorry **Savannah Lions**, **Mana Clash**, and **Roc Hatchling**, THALLID is the winner and still champion!

Did I miss an alternate answer? Let me know on the forums!

## Return of the Fungus

Yes, all kinds of crazy new Thallids return in *Time Spiral*! The puzzle shows the deceptively high power of the multiplying little Fungus monsters. Who would have thought they would beat **Savannah Lions**! Thallids have been a huge fan favorite since their release in *Fallen Empires*. These creepy living molds embody Green's philosophy of growth by building up Spore counters every upkeep, then using them to create Saproling tokens or spell effects. *Fallen Empires*' **Thallid Devourer** makes Saprolings like his little **Thallid** buddy, then eats Saprolings to get bigger. Beefy 6/3 **Feral Thallid** uses Spore counters to regenerate himself. **Thorn Thallid** can fire off his Spore counters as bursts of direct damage (Green direct damage? Hey, it's *Fallen Empires*!) **Spore Flower** spent counters to cast **Fog**. And Fungus-impersonator **Elvish Farmer** accumulated Spore counters, made Saprolings, then "farmed" them for 2 life a pop. Every play group back then seemed to have a "Thallid guy" or two, gleefully putting pennies all over his cards every upkeep, then popping them off as 1/1 creatures, steadily growing a Fungal Force of Doom. And yup, in my group a friend and I were each "The Thallid Guy." Let's take a look at the way the mold rolled back in ye olden tymes:

Thallids		
Devin Low, 1995 Casual		
Main Deck 60 cards		
19 Forest	2 Elvish Farmer	3 Fungal Bloom
1 Pendelhaven	3 Feral Thallid	2 Giant Growth
20 lands	1 Gaea's Liege	2 Lure
	2 Kaysa	1 Mox Emerald
	4 Spore Flower	2 Night Soil
	4 Thallid	1 Sol Ring
	3 Thallid Devourer	4 Spore Cloud
	4 Thorn Thallid	2 Stampede
	23 creatures	17 other spells

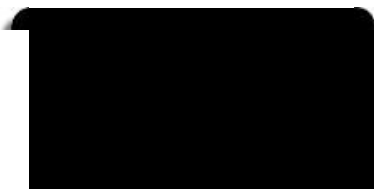
You can see a lot of hot 1996 **Magic** technology here. (I build better decks than this now, I swear!) Start with 20 lands, 20 creatures, and 20 spells and go from there. Why is **Mox Emerald** in there but not **Mox Pearl**? Because this was a *green* deck, and my Pearl belonged only in my *white* deck. Back then the strategy was to play a ton of thallids, then defend with **Spore Flower** and **Spore Cloud** until I got enough Saprolings out that I could cast **Stampede** or **Lure** and win the game. **Fungal Bloom**, four Forests and **Spore Flower** created an eternal **Fog** lock that bought you tons of time to make all the Saprolings you wanted. And sometimes I waited for the opponent to attack with everything, then cast **Spore Cloud** to lock them down for two turns, which was long enough for Team Thallid to go the distance. It was a blast to play and won its share of games. I liked the feeling of inevitability, as your growing army of Thallids grew creatures faster than anyone else without having to pay any costs. And in multiplayer **Magic**, nobody ever wanted to attack the guy with **Spore Cloud** in his deck!

## The Road to Fungification

Flash forward to February 2005. Brian Tinsman, Aaron Forsythe, Mark Rosewater and I were packing *Time Spiral* ideas onto an endless parade of whiteboards. Yup, we really started designing *Time Spiral* more than 19 months ago. Two major themes emerged that form the core of the set even today: 1) Nostalgia and 2) Time as a gameplay resource. What was the overlap between these two concepts – the Venn diagram that would pull it all together? What are **Magic** players nostalgic for that used time as a resource? It hit us like an unexpected **Spore Cloud**: Thallids.

So today's preview card is a Thallid Lord that my 1995 self would have killed to get a hold of: An enormous, yet inexpensive monster that makes all your other Thallids way better. A crazy cross between **Thallid** and **Ravenous Baloth**. And a true Lord of the Thallids that cranks out way more Fungussy Fogs, direct damage, **Regenerations** and Saprolings than any Thallid deck ever has before.

Remember, here's the original Thallid's ability:





[And here's today's preview card:](#)



Bingo.

## The Taste of a New Generation

Yup, in the old days, your **Thalids** were 1/1 for one mana. Now you get 4/4 for friggin' four. Sporesower Thalid's first ability looks a lot like the original **Thalid**. But look closely, and you see that this moldy monarch gives a Spore counter to *each* Fungus you control. So when you play him alongside five of his grimy kin, he creates as many additional Spore counters per turn as playing another *six* Thalids would. All while applying some **Loxodon Hierarch**-sized beatdown. You would be psyched about this guy for his body alone, and he's got no "balancing drawbacks" to justify his size – his abilities are all upside.

Sporesower Thalid leads a whole new array of *Time Spiral* Thalids into battle, many of them nostalgic homages to the cards of old. The design team liked Thalids that used Spore counters to make Saprolings. And we liked Thalids that used Spore counters to create spell effects. So we made most of our new Thalids use Spore Counters to make Saprolings....*and* to create spell effects. The cool thing about **Elvish**

**Farmer** was that it could use your whole army's Spore Counters and Saprolings to gain you life, not just its own Spore counters. Every single one of *Time Spiral's* **Thallids** generates Saprolings, and many of them can sacrifice any Saproling to create a spell effect, so each **Thallid** you have feeds all your other **Thallids'** abilities. Whichever ability you need most at the time, just sacrifice some of the Saproling volunteer pool, and you got it.

While **Thallids** have been resting since *Fallen Empires*, Saprolings have been working overtime. From *Invasion's* **Aura Mutation** to *9th Edition's* **Verdant Force** to *Ravnica's* whole Selesnya guild, Saprolings have been oozing out all over. It's no accident that the *Ravnica* block is full of Saproling generators and the *Time Spiral* **Thallids** can sacrifice all those Saprolings to tasty abilities. It's part of a strong push towards cross-block synergy over the last few years. Ever since Standard featured *Onslaught* Goblin decks with no *Mirrodin* cards fighting *Mirrodin* affinity decks with no *Onslaught* cards, we've been seeding synergistic combinations between cards in adjacent blocks to help decks combine elements from both blocks. We hope this reduces the chance of another "Onslaught vs. *Mirrodin*" environment. So now you can **Supply // Demand** for X Saprolings, then start feeding them into the *Time Spiral* **Thallid** machine.



## Bigger, Better, Moldier

This is a development column after all, and this card certainly had a nice, generous development. Here's the design team's take on a **Thallid Lord** From the September 30th design handoff:

```
Thallid Nurturer
1GG
Creature - Fungus
2/2
At the beginning of your upkeep, put a Spore Counter on each Fungus you control.
Remove three Spore counters from Thallid Nurturer: Put a 1/1 green Saproling creature token into play.
```

Fortunately for everyone, *Time Spiral* lead developer Brian Schneider loves to take cool ideas and forge them into awesome cards. And his *Time Spiral* development team, including Michael Donais, Aaron Forsythe, Matt Place and myself, heartily agree. So after 3 weeks of development, Schneider bumped the **Thallid lord** up to a more beefy size. The team liked the way it played, so we just kept going and going, improving the card again and again and again. Here's the tale of our plucky Fungus rising to epic heroism:

```
05-09-30 1GG 2/2 Design Handoff
05-10-19 2GG 3/3 Bigger!
05-10-24 3G 3/3 Better!
05-11-18 2GG 3/3 Back to double-colored cost.
05-11-30 2GG 3/4 But using double-colored cost as an excuse to go even bigger!
05-12-05 Name becomes Sporesower Thallid
05-01-16 2GG 4/4 Even BIGGER!
```

Why so big? Because we like you. And we like Fungus. Heck, Aaron was "The **Thallid Guy**" in his playgroup too. We were nostalgic for it!

## The Green (Bay) Defensive Line

**Thallids** also helped redefine the role of Green in *Time Spiral* Limited. In *9th Edition* gameplay, white and blue are the naturally defensive colors, featuring **Horned Turtles** and **Foot Soldiers** holding the ground while **Aven Windreaders** roar overhead. But *Time Spiral* white features tons of Flanking, a keyword that only works on offense. And White and Blue both include a lot of Shadow, a keyword that makes you virtually unblockable, but doesn't let you block at all. So the *Time Spiral* development team decided it didn't make any sense for *Time Spiral* white and blue to be as defensive as they are in *9th Edition*, *Onslaught*, and *Dissension*.

So then which color could take up the slack and actually play defense in *Time Spiral*? If white and blue don't want to set up awesome blockers and play for the long game, then who does? Let's just say you'll find yourself muttering this phrase over the next few months, when your opponents' attacks stall out and you sit there adding Spore counters: "Time favors the **Thallids**...Time favors the **Thallids**..." Our answer was green.

*Time Spiral* green has more to it than just **Thallids** of course, and it can certainly beat down with **Grizzly Bears**, grizzly slivers, **Giant Growths**, and 5/5's if it wants. But we also created an option there for you to set up a defensive green screen of some awesome walls, a non-Shadow card that can block Shadow (the descendant of green **Heartwood Dryad**), and the best common Spider of all time. Then you can sit back and grin while the **Thallids** spread their filthy roots, and you generate a huge mass of 1/1 Saproling tokens that you can sacrifice for all kinds of effects.

I'm also really excited about many "Secret **Thallid**" cards we seeded throughout *Time Spiral*, both in green and in other colors. What I mean is cards that don't say **Thallid** anywhere on them, but are secretly really really good in **Thallid** decks. Examples of cards in this role (though these specific cards aren't in *Time Spiral*) are **Echoing**

**Courage**, **Scion of the Wild**, or **Coat of Arms**. Even though they don't say **Thallid** on them, they sure are sick in those decks.

## The Primer Directive

So that's my whirlwind tour of the design and development of Sporesower **Thallid**. I'd like to hit a couple of topics about tomorrow's *Time Spiral* prerelease before I go. I'm happy to have gone to 25 of the 28 **Magic** prereleases since 1997's *Tempest*. I was one of the guys who avoided reading spoilers so that I could open the packs fresh at the prerelease, enjoy the excitement of seeing all new cards in my hand, and decide on the spur of the moment which ones were good. As a designer and developer starting just before the release of *Mirrodin*, I've been to every prerelease since then too, and I love seeing that same excitement when the players see new cards for the first time.

Up until now, we would send an FAQ for new sets to our DCI judges on the Wednesday before the prerelease, to help them get ready to judge the events. The FAQ covered all the new set's rules with some full-text card examples to explain how they all worked. Unfortunately, that guaranteed spoiling 6-12 cards per set in the FAQ, taking away some of the mystery of totally new cards.

Our new policy is instead to publish a "Rules Primer" for the new set to **magicthegathering.com** on the Monday before the prerelease. The Rules Primer has all the details of the new set's rules and mechanics, without giving away any full card texts too early. This lets us maintain more prerelease surprise and fun for everyone who goes. We'll publish an FAQ that's an expanded version of the Rules Primer, including some full card texts, on the Monday after the prerelease weekend. If you're an aspiring judge, you can find the [Rules Primer here](#). If you're a player and really want to study up on *Time Spiral* rules, I'd stick to Gottlieb's more conversational [Time Spiral rules walk-through](#), posted as this week's feature article. Better yet, don't read any rules at all – just go to the prerelease with your friends and have a blast! All the returning keywords and new abilities have reminder text on the cards that tell you what the abilities do.

Our DCI judges have proved themselves to be an exceptional array of officials in the past couple of years. We're extremely proud of their professionalism and helpfulness, and we're confident that the Rules Primer will give them the rules knowledge they need to help players understand all the new and returning *Time Spiral* mechanics. It's extremely important to us to give our DCI judges the tools and support they need to do their jobs, and we worked hard to make sure that the Rules Primer does a good job of that.

## The Nineteen Month Baby is Born

I played casual **Magic** without tournaments for many years. One of my earliest tournament experiences was the *Tempest* prerelease. It opened my eyes to a whole new scale of **Magic's** community. Just seeing hundreds of **Magic** players getting together to have fun and sling spells got me really jazzed about just how big **Magic** really was. It amazed me how many people in my area came together to crack packs, laugh about crazy topdecks, and attack for two. Nine years and twenty-five prereleases later, I still get that same happy feeling. More than any of those other 21, my mind was completely exploded by the prereleases for *Tempest*, *Invasion*, *Apocalypse*, and *Ravnica*. *Time Spiral* is going to be the fifth set to do the same thing. I didn't say this for *Saviors of Kamigawa*. *Time Spiral* is the real deal. You do not want to miss this one. After nineteen months of work and anticipation, my baby *Time Spiral* is finally going to be born. And I'm proud as hell. If anyone is going to the Seattle prerelease tomorrow, look for me and the rest of **Magic** R&D under the Gunslinging signs!



### Have you ever played with Thallids before?

- Yes, they're cool.
- Yes, but I don't like them.
- No, but I've played against them.
- No, I've never seen them played, but I knew what they were.
- No, I've never heard of them before now.



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