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Purple Reign

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 Making Magic
 Monday, September 25, 2006



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

So did you any go to the prerelease? Did you have a good time? Anything unexpected happen? Well, that's the topic of today's column. If you have no idea what I'm talking about, you will very shortly.

Let's begin by reviewing the last three weeks of previews.

Three weeks ago, I talked about *Time Spiral's* nostalgia theme. That's **something old**.

Two weeks ago, I talked about *Time Spiral's* time motif. That's **something new**.

Last week, I talked about how we took split second away from *Coldsnap*. That's **something borrowed**.

That means this week it's time for **something blue**.

Here's a card I guarantee no one expected to open up in a *Time Spiral* booster when the previews started three weeks ago. [Click here](#).

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I'm sure this card, and its frame, and its expansion symbol, and its collector number, create a good number of questions. Today I'm going to do my best to answer as many of those questions as I can.

Let's begin with...

What is this card?

Psionic Blast is one of 121 timeshifted cards found in *Time Spiral*.

Timeshifted?

Time Spiral block is about temporal chaos. Horrible things have transpired in Dominaria over the years leading to a temporal disaster. Things have gotten so bad that time itself is falling apart. As a result, the past and future are starting to fold into the present. What this means for *Time Spiral*, the set about the past (*Planar Chaos* is about the present and *Future Sight* is, well, I'm sure you can figure it out) is that items from long ago are being plucked out of time and dropped into modern day post-apocalyptic Dominaria. The timeshifted cards are the mechanic manifestation of this phenomena. You see, in *Time Spiral*, cards from **Magic's** past have been pulled into the boosters.

Is that why the cards are in the old frame?

Exactly. Although in the spirit of openness, I should point out that all of the cards are using the *Seventh Edition* version of the old card frame even if the card comes from a different time. I also want to note that this restriction limited our selection of timeshifted cards to cards that appeared in the old frame (a.k.a. pre-*Mirrodin*).

Other than the frame, are the cards identical to the original versions?

Not exactly. The cards went through the same process they do when we add cards to the basic set. The templates and rules text are updated as well as any necessary creature types. Few cards changed enough to have a substantial impact on functionality. The names, art and flavor text have all remained the same. Also, the cards have been given a purple *Time Spiral* expansion symbol.

Oh yes, the purple expansion symbol. What's up with that?

The purple expansion symbol is a new rarity level. Because the timeshifted cards in *Time Spiral* appear in a rarity significantly different from any other rarity, they were assigned their own new rarity level.

How rare are the purple cards?

There are 121 purple cards and they appear one per pack. *Time Spiral* has 80 rares that also appear one per pack. Basic math tells us that this makes the timeshifted cards over 50% rarer. Remember though that I am only talking about the rarity as they appear in *Time Spiral* boosters. As all the *Time Spiral* timeshifted cards are repeats, they already exist in the market at varying levels and rarities. What this means is that from a *Time Spiral* perspective, *Squire* and *Akroma* are the same rarity. That is, versions of the two cards with purple expansion symbols exist in equal number, but from a whole history sense, *Akroma* is more rare than *Squire*.

Is there any way to tell how rare a purple card was in its prior printing?

No. We talked about trying to use the expansion symbol to also convey the previous rarity, but all the versions we tried to show this information proved both confusing and ugly.

Since the purple cards have a *Time Spiral* expansion symbol, does that mean you can play them wherever *Time Spiral* is legal?

Yes, it does. All the purple cards are legal in any other format that *Time Spiral* cards are legal. Yes, this will include Standard, Block Constructed, and Limited once *Time Spiral* is legal for each format.

Are the purple cards considered part of *Time Spiral*?

Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that the cards will coexist with the other cards in any and all formats, and they are both found in *Time Spiral* booster packs. No, in the sense that the cards aren't treated the same in all regards. (More on this in a second.) This is why the official set size for *Time Spiral* is 301.

How aren't the two sets the same?

The 301 normal *Time Spiral* cards (meaning the common, uncommon, rare and basic land cards) are considered a separate group for purposes of collecting. On *Magic Online*, for example, you do not need to have all 121 purple cards to redeem a *Time Spiral* set. (You can, however, separately redeem a *Time Spiral* timeshifted set.) And the collector



numbers are separate to keep people from feeling forced to have all 121 repeats to have a completed set. Note that the fact that all the timeshifted cards were pre-existing cards weighed heavily into our decision to separate out the two sets. Because the timeshifted cards in *Planar Chaos* and *Future Sight* are all new cards, we've grouped them together as a single set for purposes of collector number and redemption. This means that the announced numbers for *Planar Chaos* and *Future Sight* already count the timeshifted cards in each respective set.

Wait. Wait. Wait. *Planar Chaos* and *Future Sight* have timeshifted cards?

Yes, but they're different than how *Time Spiral* does them. The rest of the timeshifted cards in the block are not repeats of old cards. As such, they are being grouped together for purposes of collector number and redemption. Also, the rest of the timeshifted cards will have normal **Magic** rarities (common, uncommon and rare). *Time Spiral* is the only set with the purple rarity.

If *Planar Chaos* and *Future Sight*'s timeshifted cards aren't repeats, what are they?

A very good question. Not one I'm going to answer now, but a very good question nonetheless.

Why 121 timeshifted cards?

It was a good number for technical reasons. Why such a high number? Because we thought that having a high variance was important to creating the feeling we wanted of the past invading the set. Plus, we already had the cards, so making them wasn't horribly cost prohibitive.

Is this where the 301/422 issue came from?

Yes. For those unaware (and I'll get to the full story in next week's column), at different times Wizards of the Coast reported *Time Spiral* as having both 301 and 422 cards. Having the two subsets of cards is what caused this confusion. Officially, *Time Spiral* is considered to be a 301-card set with an added 121-bonus subset.

You said that there is one purple card per pack. What rarity does it replace?

The timeshifted cards in *Time Spiral* replace a common card. Normally, a **Magic** booster has 1 rare, 3 uncommons and 11 commons. *Time Spiral* boosters instead have 1 rare, 3 uncommons, 10 commons and a timeshifted card.

So you can get two rares in one booster?

Technically the purple cards aren't rare. They're at a rarity higher than rare. But what you're really asking is can you get two cards in a booster pack that in some incarnation have had a gold expansion symbol? The answer is yes you can. In fact, if you count previously-rare timeshifted cards as "rares", you can actually open up *Time Spiral* boosters with three rare cards.

Say what?

Another change made in *Time Spiral* (and this one is just a change moving forward in **Magic**) is where premium cards are positioned in the booster pack. Previously, premium cards showed up replacing the same rarity as the one they displaced. A premium common replaced a common card, a premium uncommon replaced an uncommon card, and a premium rare replaced a rare card. As of *Time Spiral*, all premium cards (save timeshifted cards, but I'll get there in a moment) now replace a common card regardless of the rarity of the premium card. This means that when you get a premium rare, you will get it in addition to the normal rare in the pack. Combine this with a "rare" timeshifted card and that's a pack with three rares. Welcome to *Time Spiral*!

Do the purple cards have premium versions?

Yes, they do.

In what slot does a premium timeshifted card appear?

Premium timeshifted cards appear in the timeshifted slot.

Can one booster have both a premium rare and a premium timeshifted card?

No, only one premium card can appear per pack. You'll have to settle with packs with three rares only one of which (a non-timeshifted card in this case) is a premium.

Can you tell us what the 121 purple cards are?

If you're interested, just check out this week's feature article – [a sortable *Time Spiral* spoiler](#).

How did you decide which cards became one of the 121 cards?

That is a great question. So good, in fact that Aaron Forsythe has written next week's feature article all about the timeshifted cards and how we decided to pick the 121 we did (you see, next week is Timeshifted Week here at [magicthegathering.com](#)). It was a long and elaborate process. You'll be shocked to hear some of the cards that were on the list at one point or another. (And if you haven't seen the current list, you'll probably also be shocked when you see it.) I don't want to steal any of Aaron's thunder, so you'll have to check it out next Monday.

How did you come up with this crazy idea in the first place?

And that's what I'll be writing about next Monday. I mean, it will be Timeshifted Week after all. In addition, as I hinted above there's an interesting story about watching the rumors evolve from Wizards' side of the wall. Definitely check back next week.

Why didn't you tell us about it until today?

Two reasons. First, it's been our goal to try and recapture some of the surprise and excitement that **Magic** used to have when sets came out. The game is all about discovery, yet in recent years, the prereleases (and releases) held very few surprises. When we first came up with the idea of the timeshifted cards, we realized that it provided the perfect opportunity to do just this, partly because it was a twist we didn't think anyone would see coming and partly because the nature of the subset of cards made it easy to hide its existence.



Second, we wanted the focus on *Time Spiral* to be on the non-timeshifted cards when the previews began. We knew if we started by announcing cards like **Psionic Blast** were coming back, the spotlight would be focused on the repeats rather than on the new cards. By announcing the timeshifted cards later, they feel like a cool add-on rather than the main feature.

What do you say to the players who believe that the lack of information hurts the new sets?

I'd say that all the data we've collected on *Time Spiral* doesn't seem to support their side. Our monitoring showed that *Time Spiral* has created greater activity on the bulletin boards and threads. Pretty much all the bulletin boards and threads. Even those on the rumor sites. And early indicators make me feel comfortable that sales will follow suit.

What do you say to players whose prerelease enjoyment is dampened by the inability to learn the cards before the tournament?

My answer is that I think there is a discrepancy between what some players feel the prerelease is about and what Wizards feels it's about. To us, the prerelease is meant to be a fun, dynamic event. It's a chance for the community to come together and learn about the newest set. On the casual to competitive scale, it leans heavily towards the casual side, more so than any other premiere event we run.

As such, we have been taking steps over the last year to play up the enjoyment factor over the competitive one. This is why we've opted for letting out less information. Being exposed to new things in a place surrounded by other people doing the same is simply more fun than having everyone learn the information at home alone in front of their computer.

I know some of you disagree with this viewpoint. My answer to all of you is that our organized play program creates many opportunities for players seeking more competitive play. We run thousands and thousands of tournaments every year and the vast majority of them are focused on high-end competitive play. The big exception is the prereleases. Their audience is radically different than a PTQ or a Friday Night **Magic**. And this is the audience we're choosing to cater to for this series of events. If a more casual, friendly atmosphere doesn't sound like the kind of tournament you want then please, by all means, don't come to the prerelease. It isn't for you.

That said, I have to disagree with the players who claim that not having the information ahead of time hurts the skill testing of the tournament. It changes what skills are tested, but I'll argue that those skills are an even better determiner of play skill. As an example, what format does R&D believe is most skill testing? Not a Constructed format, but draft. Why? Because being good at draft forces you to be able to constantly adjust to new circumstances. Similar skills I would argue to playing with cards you've never played with (or even seen) before. You want to really test your skills? Try going to a prerelease where you didn't bother to read the whole spoiler the night before.

So you wanted to keep the timeshifted cards a secret... Why didn't you come clean once the rumor sites were able to confirm their existence?



Our goal was to surprise as many people as we could. It's near impossible in this day and age to keep all information locked away (although I will say that almost all *Time Spiral* information not provided by Wizards or by outlets given the information by Wizards came much, much later in the process than other recent sets). We understand that the players who choose to frequent the rumor sites will know more information than those who do not. We also know that this is a tiny percentage of the players, even of those who frequently read about **Magic** on the internet. In short, we didn't say anything because the majority of players didn't know.

In addition, there are a lot of players that make the conscious choice not to know. They come to our site because they trust that we aren't going to ruin the surprise for them. It's hard for us to say that the set is more fun if you don't know everything if we then tell you everything. This is the second reason we

didn't let the "timeshifted cat out of the bag", because we felt the prerelease would be more fun (notice you're seeing the word "fun" a lot today) if they didn't know. (As a quick aside, I'd love to hear from players that were surprised and how the experience felt.)

Did you lie to the public?

No. We were sneaky. We definitely misled the public into assuming things that weren't true. (It's a hard thing to guess that a set would be packaged along with a second subset of cards.) I promise next week when I talk about how the knowledge of timeshifted cards evolved, I'll walk you through some of the things we said. As you'll see, we didn't exactly say what people remember us saying.

The important message is this. We were trying to throw the equivalent of a surprise party. We knew that you would be happier not knowing about the surprise, so we took advantage of the fact that you didn't know what we were doing to say things that sounded like they meant one thing when in actuality they meant another. We were careful though not to actually lie. That said, yes we fooled you, but only because we believed that in the end you'd have a better experience. If our sneakiness upset anyone, I apologize. Please understand that we did it with the best of intentions.

Anything else you'd like to say about the timeshifted cards?

As the guy in charge of doing things the players don't expect, I'm very proud of the timeshifted cards. I think they both add a great deal to how the set plays (especially Limited) and work in beautifully with the theme of the block design. And remember, these are just the first set of timeshifted cards. They get even more fun as the year progresses.

That's all I have for today. Definitely check back next week when I'll tell the tale of the timeshifted cards. Wait until you see the story from our side.

Until then, may you know the warm fuzzies that the timeshifted cards can bring.

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*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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