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Dueling in Dominaria

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Taste the Magic
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When you're off slinging cards with your pals, it is pretty easy to play "in-world." I explained this term a few weeks back in [Parlez Vous Part Deux](#). It describes the mindset of the player who has become the dueling mage, instead of a card-flipping Earthling. Anyway, it has always been easy to get *in-world*—you're a mage, and these are your spells, you draw mana from the land to cast those spells, and when you cast them, they do their magical thing. But in post-apocalyptic Dominaria, the setting for *Time Spiral*, being a dueling wizard is not quite so simple. The problem is easily summed up in two words, temporal chaos. These two words were oft repeated by all sorts of folks at Wizards way back when *Time Spiral* was in its creative infancy.



The idea is that time is no longer linear. It's jagged, rippled, scribbled, shredded and tied in knots. We've already seen in card previews how this temporal chaos theme plays out in card mechanics. Suspend, Split Second, and Flash all redefine what time means to gameplay. Other cards do not have new time-tinkering mechanics, but involve time in some other way. The question for us, (the dueling mages), is how do these mechanics play out *in-world*?

Some timelines forever fray, branch, and intermingle. Others end abruptly.

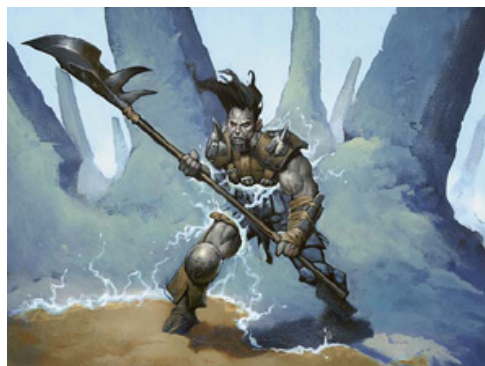
I can help...some. The truth is, time is not something human beings are smart enough to really define—yet. Sit down and watch any movie or television show that deals with time travel or time manipulation and you'll see it has enough holes in it to strain pasta. Also, there's the whole temporal chaos theme. It's "chaos," and that is about as difficult to define as time. But the good news is that there is some solid ground to stand on. Once you're finished with this article, you should have a pretty good idea of how Dominarian mages are wielding magic, and how you can decide for yourself how your spells are taking shape in a land where time is twisted.

Time Rifts

Before we get into how specific cards and card mechanics play out *in-world*, we need to look at the bizarre and powerful thing known as a "Time Rift." Time rifts are literally rips in the fabric of time. They are the points where time's continuity is broken and two or more time streams intermingle. These rifts can be fleeting and they can be persistent, they can be pea-sized and they can be as tall and wide as a mountain range. Their shape, size, appearance, and stability are all fluctuating, but one thing is always the same – all rifts give one time period access to the people, places, and *magic* of another time!

Suspend

Suspend is a really interesting magical tool when playing *in-world*. There are (at least) two ways in which Suspend has been interpreted on cards. In both ways, the visual is the same; the spell or creature is puncturing the fabric of time, emerging from its own time into ours. This "fabric" is a bluish veil that separates the differing timelines. The spell itself is taking advantage of a weakness in this veil, creating its own little temporary time rift through which the spell can erupt. When a mage casts a spell, (if suspended) the bluish veil materializes before her, and the first inklings of the spell or creature is visible on the other side. As the time counters tick off, the spell becomes more and more real, more solid, and in some cases physically closer to the veil. Then, when the last counter is removed, the spell takes final form and bursts through the veil and works its magical wonders. I am reminded of the scene in *Star Wars Episode I* where Qui Gon and Darth Maul are separated by the red force fields—Maul huffs and steams on the other side, waiting for the security clocks to reset and lower the force fields. It's like he's been suspended, and is waiting for the time counters to tick off so he can leap out and slaughter the lowly mage he was summoned to fight.



So back to the two ways. The first way is the simple way. You, the mage, are taking advantage of a world in which time is being redefined each moment. You know that the land is mana-starved and that you'll never be able to

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draw enough power to summon the **great sea-beast** that you need to squash your foe. So you use the energy provided by the powerful time rifts to fuel your spell instead. When you cast spells using the time rifts, your product comes through the veil. When you cast them using mana only, they do not. Creatures and spells of present day Dominaria are summoned on the cheap by using the time rifts as magic batteries. Most suspend cards work this way.

The other way is not so simple. Though the method of casting this second type of suspend spell is the same, the product is different. The difference is that, while the rifts are still used to power the spell, they are also used to reach through to other time periods to find the magic of a different place and time. On Dominaria, where the rifts are most plentiful and most potent, mages and seers can connect with visions of the past—giving them the access to spells and creatures they would not have known existed. In summoning magic from the past, a wizard has to spend either loads of mana or time, or both to pull the spell through one, sometimes multiple time rifts, across eons and through the veil to the present. **Ith, High Arcanist** is such a card. Ith is not alive in Dominaria today, but a mage can look through the eye of a rift into the past and call him. In this case, either way you cast him, he's coming through the veil. **Lotus Bloom, Ancestral Vision, Restore Balance, Wheel of Fate, Hypergenesis, and Living End** are like this as well. They're all old spells that cannot be cast at all without the use of the rifts.



Timeshifted Cards

Being Timeshifted is not all that different from the second type of suspend spell mentioned above—with the exception, of course, that they do not have suspend. The similarity is in the fact that the rifts, open doors to the past, give us access to spells and creatures that we would otherwise see only in the history tomes at Tolaria and Epityr, and even those are mostly destroyed. Stepping *in-game* for a moment, Timeshifted cards all appear in old card frames with old art. This is fun stuff for us, the card-flipping Earthlings. But, (back *in-world*) we mages cast these spells and they, too may materialize through a crackling time rift or a cascading blue veil. It's also possible that they do not. How is this possible, if all magic from ages past comes through the time rifts? Imagine this: Word is out that a long unspoken name is once again being uttered in the darkest pits of Dominaria. They say **Sol'kanar** is here. It could not be! Has he come through the rifts to crush us as he did the ancients so long ago? Well, not this mage. Instead of running into him in a dark bog, I'll just summon him myself! You see, since he's already here, there's no need for the rifts to help me out. The funny thing about Temporal Chaos is, well, the chaos part. For all I know, **Sol'kanar** only blinked into the present day for a minute and a half. This is one of the places where you, the director of the theatre of your mind, get to decide how you want the temporal chaos to play out. In my mind, they almost always come through the veil—because it looks cool.

Split Second

Split Second is a mechanic that I think we need to chalk up to temporal chaos. It's really hard to envision the look and feel of something so game-specific as "the stack." We could start with the playtest name for the ability - "Superfast." The idea was, his magic is so fast that you cannot respond to it. Ever. It was like an uber-interrupt. The thing is, technically they're not any faster than any other instant (or card with flash, for that matter.)

I think it's perfectly fine to imagine Split Second spells as being faster than others. We did take pains to try and illustrate and name them this way. You can see that the art is shown "split," like a film projector was suddenly stopped in between two frames. This sudden stoppage supports the really fast spell idea, but I think it gives fuel to an even cooler one. Since time has ceased to travel in one direction, and in some cases ceased to move at all, it is easier for mages to harness these new physics of the world and apply them to their magic. Split Second, in my mind, is when a spell's power is augmented by a little magic that actually cuts time, temporarily halting it in the middle of one moment, one second. The "splitting" of a second creates a short span in which time ceases to move and nothing else can happen. It also creates a situation in which we would see images split between one moment and the next. Very cool. Very powerful. Imagine a fire spell with split second in which the cone of fire bursts out and, for a moment, you see the now—flames held in mid-leap just beyond your fingertips, and the later—smoldering remains of your foe. Then, as quickly as the image formed in your mind, it is gone, and you see the whole thing play out before you, from





leaping flames to burning enemy streaking around with arms waving frantically, to the charred, baked stiff on the hard salty ground. Sweeeet.

If you ask me, Superfast would have killed a lot of room for imagination with this ability. Split Second, on the other hand, busts it wide open, while still hitting the time theme hard. Thank developer Devin Low for that doozy. I did, and I am doing it again right now.

There's still plenty of room for you to interpret how time rifts and temporal chaos help make your Time Spiral spells come to life. There are fragments of old spells brought into the present, as well as old spell effects taking new shape in the now. Look at [Stonewood Invocation](#) and [Smallpox](#). Are these the products of unstable time rifts, bringing forth just part of an

ancient spell? Was the ancient magic too weak to pass through time intact? Were they victims of some Dominarian version of Wonkavision? Perhaps.

Look at [Verdant Embrace](#) and [Unyaro Bees](#). Were these spells changed within the rifts, mixed with other magic caught between times then brought through the veil and made real? Perhaps.

Look at [Sulfurous Blast](#) and [Haunting Hymn](#). What is it about how you cast the spell that determines its power? Could it be like a mini version of suspend, where the spell cooks for a moment on the other side of the veil, powering up the longer you take to cast it? Or could it be just another product of temporal chaos, and time having a new meaning moment by moment? Perhaps.

Look at [Magus of the Jar](#) and [Magus of the Mirror](#). Are they just like you—wizards pulling magic from the past into the now? Do they use the time rifts too? Perhaps. You decide.

Right now I am seeing a curtain drop. Not just the curtain that is dropping on this week's article, but also a shimmering curtain of sapphire light! It separates me and my computer screen. There, growing on the other side of the liquid-clear veil is a small speck. It is growing. Growing. And then I see it, hovering there just behind the veil. It is a Chocolate cake! I try to grab it, but my hand passes right through. You see, I have no cakes in my house. So I must Suspend one. Chocolate is a cryptic substance, people, and is not easy to conjure. I must wait a long, long time for it to come through the veil. I have enough time to go downstairs and get a plate and fork. Hopefully I will return before it flops down on my keyboard and gets all stuck in between the keys. Yes, cake is worth the risk, but I must hurry...

*Matt Cavotta has always been a fantasy goober. At various points in his gooberhood, he has used his nerdy knowledge to become a professional goober. He went from scribbling pictures of his own **D&D** characters to illustrating books and cards for his two favorite games; **D&D** and **Magic**. Then he channeled his inner 7th level Illusionist/3rd level Bard and landed himself a job at Wizards as a writer. He continues to cast his illusion spells each morning, lest they find out he's just another goober.*



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