

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Shifty-Eyed Evaluations

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Limited Information
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It's Timeshifted Week here on magicthegathering.com, and that seems like a fine time to go over some of the interesting purple cards available to sealed and draft players. This won't be an exhaustive list of timeshifted cards, but rather my thoughts on some intriguing ones. After all, they will be with us for a long time. As they're rarer than rare, you may not get a lot of firsthand experience with these to determine their worth in your pile. Normally that wouldn't be a major deal, but the clock's ticking on *Time Spiral* tournaments. PTQs for Pro Tour-Geneva start this weekend. You certainly don't want to be left behind at the Top 8 draft, right? You know it.

Red

Avalanche Riders

Darwin Kastle's Invitational design has played very well in previous environments, and this one is no different. A 2/2 for four isn't incredible, but the haste helps. The real kicker is the land kill option, which is quite relevant in a mana hungry format like *Time Spiral's*. Land kill can randomly win games, but its inconsistency relegates it to the sideboard or drafts gone bad. However if you're guaranteed a relevant creature alongside a *Stone Rain* at a fairly cheap price, the card becomes eminently playable. Now you can play the luck angle, and if/when that doesn't work, you're still left with a decent creature. Not bad at all, and that's why *Avalanche Riders* is a card I'm always happy to include.
 Grade: B+



Desolation Giant

The kicked effect is clearly powerful. Wrath + threat is one of the strongest plays you can make in limited. Unfortunately, the cost for that move is pretty high; in this case, a solid dedication to red and white. If you're already drafting those colors, you're in good shape with a very strong addition to your deck. If you're *not* there yet, things are a bit more difficult. This decision is most relevant in the early stages of a draft when you're still feeling out signals. Needless to say, if someone upstream is drafting red or white (or both!), you're going to be in a bad way. Is *Desolation Giant* worth the risk? My instinct says it's not quite there for Pack 1, Pick 1. Should there be a green or black or blue card of solid quality, just grab it and pass the Giant along. You'll not only keep your options open, you'll tell your neighbor what you won't be drafting, leaving you free and clear on the way back. Two neighbors playing four different colors are in a nice situation.
 Grade: B

Disintegrate

The nut high. Dealing damage equal to your land count is nice, but what really puts this over the top is that *Disintegrate* now finds itself in a format with storage lands. *Disintegrate* is a late game auto-win, but a *Molten Slagheap* with just a few counters on it opens that window even faster. There's no card to take over this if you're red, and even if you aren't, you would need a very compelling reason not to take this and splash for it anyway.
 Grade: A+

Orgg

Orgg has a "drawback," which is "winning the game very quickly". Seriously, just when things get interesting, you've already won. *Orgg* finds himself in a set with *morph* and *shadow*, two mechanics not known for producing creatures of high power. Your worst-case scenario means you can't attack because your opponent has a large creature out. You could tap it with a *Coral Trickster* I suppose, or just take comfort in the fact that while your Orc-Goblin monster can't attack (yet), your opponent will be far too petrified to get their guy anywhere near your life total. A nice package for five mana.
 Grade: A

Green

Hail Storm

Simply incredible. *Sulfurous Blast* is, if not the best uncommon in *Time Spiral*, certainly in the top three. *Hail Storm* isn't quite as flexible, but for a green card-for any color, really-it's excellent removal. Be sure to watch your Saproling count when playing it, which might entail leaving your spore counters where they are for the time being. By the way, a green player who does keep their *Thallids* spored up may indeed be planning to *Hail Storm* you. One of those cards to be very aware of in *Time Spiral* limited.
 Grade: A

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Gaea's Blessing

I love this card. It doesn't seem like much, but this card *will* win you the game given enough time. The cantrip effect means you can always cycle it early, although it's the late game where it really shines. With both players at depleted decks looking to topdeck, returning your three best cards to your deck is a subtle but powerful shift in potential. **Gaea's Blessing** tweaks the numbers in your favor, just a little bit, but often times it's enough. If that weren't sufficient, nothing is stopping you from targeting cards in an opponent's graveyard. That includes flashback cards, **Valor**, or even creature cards right before someone removes the final counter off **Living End**. It's not flashy, but it's flexible, it's cheap, and it replaces itself. What's not to love?

Grade: B+

Wall of Roots

A week ago I was faced with the very difficult draft decision of **Wall of Roots** versus **Thallid Shell-Dweller**. Both are excellent early blockers, although of course the **Wall of Roots** has diminishing capabilities. Clearly **Wall of Roots** on turn two looks better than the Shell-Dweller, just like the opposite is true on turn ten. I went with the Shell-Dweller in the pack, but I think it was a mistake. **Wall of Roots** has two big bonuses: it helps offset bad luck and promotes the possibility of good. **Mwonvuli Acid-Moss** is a particularly scary turn three card, but any spell that costs four looks better a turn earlier. **Wall of Roots** makes that lucky opening possible. In addition, a poor mana draw is going to have you very grateful for an alternate mana source, even if it will never deal damage like the Shell-Dweller. Both cards are strong, and it was a close call. Frankly, the decision won't come up often. I just wish that when it did, I remembered that there's always a turn two-but there's no guarantee of a turn ten.

Grade: B

Verdeloth the Ancient

Verdeloth is another high-casting-cost bomb creature along the lines of **Avatar of Woe** and Akroma (below). Of them, Verdeloth is the worst, but not by a whole lot. One of the more annoying points of Verdeloth is the symmetrical Saproling-pumping effect. It doesn't come up too often though, and a 4/7 is still the biggest creature on the board. Of course, green decks should always be able to find a big fatty or two to include in their deck. Verdeloth is near the top of that list, but if you find yourself looking at Dirty Verde versus **Squall Line** or **Sporesower Thallid**, feel free to take the card with the more unique effect. Large creatures will come.

Grade: B+

White

Akroma, Angel of Wrath

She's big and beefy. She only asks for eight mana and a strong dedication to the forces of white. Early on, say Pack 1, Pick 1, you can bend your deck around her. That subversion looks like taking Totems and **Prismatic Lens** a bit earlier, and lessening your interest in Spellshapers like **Icatian Crier**. Why's that? Well, what precisely are you going to pitch to make little Citizens? You need your lands to cast Akroma and you need your spells to stay alive to cast Akroma. If you have a card that requires a steady stream of land drops, Spellshapers and looters are going to lose a lot of their potency. By extension, if your deck is already built around those effects, Akroma is probably going to get pitched early on; you'll never get to eight mana. She's certainly powerful, but she comes with a wee bit of baggage. There will be times when your white deck is going to want to take a different card, and that's just fine.

Grade: B+

Honorable Passage

There are two things I like here. One is that it's a cheap, primal effect that always finds a home in limited decks. **Pay No Heed** was no superstar, but it wasn't unplayable. What sets **Honorable Passage** apart is that red clause, a savage race-winner against red if ever there was one. Also keep in mind that for sealed, the best decks are more likely to be packing **Disintegrate** at table one. That means that your **Honorable Passage** becomes more relevant the better you do. Clearly, reversing an X spell should be a finisher. That potential alone makes it maindeck-worthy, and a very solid deal for two mana.

Grade: B

Squire

The ultimate fighter. The once and future king. **Squire** is what we dream of becoming, someday. Women want him and men want him. **Squire** is two parts perfection and one part rainbow. Must be nice; GG. The end of evolution.

Grade: A+++ , S Class, Platinum Edition.





The true king of the timeshifted hill

Witch Hunter

An interesting guy. One and a half relevant abilities, tacked onto a horrid mana-cost-to-stats ratio. This is a bit too fragile to be a true bomb, but in the late game, **Witch Hunter** definitely breaks a stalemate. Hopefully your white deck isn't too mana-hungry with Rebels or the like. You'll also want to make sure your deck can handle giving up a turn to cast such a smallish creature. It won't turn the game around if you're losing, which keeps it off A status, but any time you're at a stalemate or even a little ahead, **Witch Hunter** will finish the job.

Grade: B+

Black

Bad Moon

Bad Moon looks fine in a deck with **Dauthi Slayers** and **Withered Wretches**. Unfortunately, that's a rather unlikely creature suite. I love it as a sideboard card. Its cheap casting cost can give you a very good turn. I don't care for its symmetry, and I have to acknowledge that a lot of black decks don't actually use their black cards for attacking. Some decks will enjoy **Bad Moon's** effect very much, but they'll be rare. Pick it up mid-pack in case your deck becomes aggressive or you want a sideboard card. There's no need to bend over backwards for it, because you shouldn't want to.

Grade: C

Avatar of Woe

The comments on Akroma mostly apply here, except Avatar is easier to cast and in a color that's better at making the game go long. There are times when **Sudden Death** or **Stronghold Overseer** are going to look like better picks, but not that often. **Avatar of Woe** is simply a terror once it's in play, and it's worth trying to get there.

Grade: A

Undertaker

How good is your best creature? How good are all of your creatures? Do your monsters require killings, or will your opponent just not care about them once they're in play? These are pertinent questions on the way to evaluating **Undertaker**. She's a mere 1/1, so the rest of your forces better have a bit more impact. One toughness isn't great at the moment, so if you're going to commit to the puny human, make sure she'll be doing good things for you. To be fair, some decks will roll over and die to infinite **Raise Dead**, and that brings up her score considerably. But when determining whether to take **Undertaker** or a genuine threat, stick with the card that doesn't require other things to go right to function. It's simply a question of consistency.

Grade: B-

Funeral Charm

This card does so much and asks so little in return. A mere tap of a Swamp, and you've killed a creature (**Undertaker?**), dealt direct damage, or made them discard their only card *during their draw step!* That's a great



set of abilities for a teeny little instant, and it's why **Funeral Charm** is the most respected Charm ever printed. It doesn't look like much, but those abilities added together make it more than worth the investment of a single mana and a draft pick. If only there was a way to give it entwine.

Grade: A-

Blue

Giant Oyster

Surprisingly excellent. Three toughness is a good place to be, and unopposed, it will give you a great No Mercy effect. For a four-mana-cost Blue card, that's a pretty good deal. And if you can pair it with **Vesuvan Shapeshifter** and **Scryb Ranger** like I did at the pre-release, well...

Grade: A

Ovinomancer

The effect is nice, and late game you won't feel the pinch of returning three lands. In fact, with Spellshapers you might appreciate it. On the other hand, for the first 6 turns or so you'll really hate setting yourself back that much. In fact, you'll be downright miserable if you do bring your lands back just to have **Ovinomancer** die immediately. As it's 0/1, that's not an impossible occurrence. Finally, and this is a *Time Spiral* special, **Fathom Seer** already returns lands to your hand when you want them to, and for an equitable effect. Turning **Akroma, Angel of Wrath** into a sheep is hilarious, I'll readily concede. Is it worth running such a risky card to pull off?

Generally not, but if you're dearly short on removal, you could do worse.

Grade: C

Merfolk Assassin

Tap, kill is a nice effect. Unfortunately, all the Islandwalk providers are timeshifted cards! That's asking for a lot to go right. The **War Barge** combo, while classic, is just too slow and fragile for our hectic modern drafts. Even if you should be so lucky as to draft them both, I'd still want to leave them on the bench.

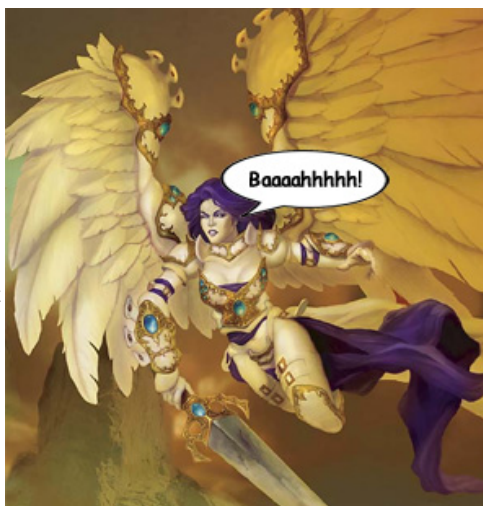
Grade: D

Willbender

Back in the day, everyone had a story about some crazy flipped **Willbender**. Usually it was along the lines of flipping a **Flame Wave** with a **Glacial Ray** and **Inspiration** spliced on. There was always some exaggeration, of course, but the point was that **Willbender** caused major upsets. Now, **Willbender** was an uncommon in a small set, so its existence was generally considered when facing down a face down and 1. These days it's back as an ultra-purple-rare, and that makes all the difference. Blue has an excellent Morph at common that flips for free, and loves to do exactly that in response to removal. Thus, the blue player's morphs are often left alone. That's great news for the **Willbender** player, who gets to do normal stuff before keeping flip mana open. Before you turn

Willbender up, make sure there's no one standing behind your opponent; **Willbender** causes a lot of reeling. It's a fine card that doesn't create an impetus to switch colors, but is highly welcome in an already established Blue deck. People are going to be hit hard by this guy, again.

Grade: A-



Colorless

Claws of Gix

Why? What does it offer? Is **Stasis** or **Necro** running around? Wouldn't you rather spend that activation mana on another storage counter or a bigger creature? Is a few life really worth a card? Am I missing something?

Grade: D (?)

Serrated Arrows

Early on in a draft, there are very few cards I'd want to see over **Serrated Arrows**. The effect is extremely powerful, and it comes at a reasonable price. There are a lot of one-toughness creatures in *Time Spiral*, giving the Arrows plenty of targets. Even if their creatures are bigger, you can permanently reduce the damage coming, or just make their combat a chore. Those are a lot of perks for the cost of a and an arrow counter. And if you're playing blue, you also get **Riftwing Cloudskate** and **Tolarian Sentinel** shenanigans. A rock-solid pick.

Grade: A


Multicolored

If you can cast them, you probably want them. **Stormbind** and **Shadowmage Infiltrator** can completely dominate a game, but they're all good. In the case of **Merieke Ri Berit**, try not to use her for attacking. Learned that one the

hard way.
Grade: Exceeds Expectations

Lands

Desert

Desert looked merely decent until I actually saw it in play. There are still a lot of one-toughness creatures in *Time Spiral*, and none of them have protection from **Deserts**. There's also no creature with protection from desserts, which clearly some creatures would benefit from (looking at you **Voidmage Prodigy**). Anyway, **Desert** invalidates a surprising number of decks, all for the low low price of a . It doesn't even hurt your development! **Desert** isn't a flashy card, but in much the same way that **Serrated Arrows** always finds a target, **Desert** does bad things to opponents' decks. How high you should take it is up to you, but I tend to favor colorless uncounterable sources of repetitive damage that don't cost a slot in your deck. That's me, though.

Grade: A-

Gemstone Mine/Arena/Safe Haven

These lands are grouped together for one reason: They're not really lands. They're actually very inexpensive spells. I know **Gemstone Mine** looks like a land and taps like a land, but you surely don't want to count it as a land. None of these cards are bad, they just come packed with little blows to your development. The way to offset that is to have your development already in place, where creature kill or creature save or **Disintegrate** will come in handy without a noticeable loss to you. Hence, play a regular amount of lands. Just put these in the spell pile, right between **Hypergenesis** and **Funeral Charm**, and you'll do fine.

Grade: **Gemstone Mine**-B, **Arena**-B+, **Safe Haven**-C



Spiral On

That's all for this week. Those double-bomb boosters bring some unique challenges and evaluations to the drafter, which is all to the good. These are certainly powerful cards, but *Time Spiral* isn't exactly lacking in that department. Even if you've played with the timeshifted cards in their previous incarnations, things have definitely changed. Give them a try and see which ones work for you in this brand new world. Good luck to the competitors for the upcoming PTQs, and thanks for reading.



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