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Reviewing Some Reprints

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Swimming With Sharks
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Welcome to Timeshifted Week!

Well, I suppose since it's Thursday and Timeshifted Week began on Monday, you've either already had your welcome or never actually noticed it was a theme week, which would make my greeting three or four days tardy (go figure, given the time theme). Sorry about that.

Time Spiral's "purples," or timeshifted cards, are some of the coolest to grace cardboard in recent years. And while there is a rotten apple, black sheep, or *Squire* in every family, initial reports say that a pretty significant proportion of the timeshifted cards - say one in four - will see tournament play. Of those, a fair number are out-and-out tidal waves, crashing against the seaside town of Standard, leaving the once-orderly minds of its inhabitants a waterlogged - but perhaps wiser - ruin.

You'll not find a bigger fan of, say, *Twisted Abomination* or *Thornscape Battlemage* in Constructed, and few will argue for the viability of *Dandan* with greater vigor than yours truly, but the first part of this article is going to deal with the biggest and splashiest starlets of the upcoming Standard. I am focusing on Standard because, well, it's *the standard*, and because States, Champs, what have you are already upon us like a pack of dire wolves.

Let's start the clock!

The Top 10 Timeshiftees

Akroma, Angel of Wrath

We might as well start off with a good card, and Akroma is a great one. Standard players will both pay retail and some combination of 3C , 2W , 2C - or 1C for style and value - to put her into play. Once there, she will win the game in 2-3 turns, many times thanks to an errant *Stomping Ground* or certainly *Dark Confidant* - and Akroma's own new teammate, *Psionic Blast*.

Look for Akroma in updates to Solar Flare and U/W Control; she may be a staple to both. Akroma loves Rakdos-flavored removal but hates a late *Smallpox* (*early Smallpox* is often right up her alley, though, helping to set up her eventual *Resurrection*).

Given that she costs twice the amount of a typical "I win" spell, what makes *Akroma, Angel of Wrath* so good?

While her cost-to-power ratio is nothing to write home about (just check out *Spectral Force*), Akroma's in-game presence is almost unequalled. She plays very much like a jacked-up *Morphling* who, while initially quite expensive, doesn't require any additional mana to untap and pump (and let's face it, she pumps bigger than the biggest *Morphling* anyway). Because she has haste, Akroma can win a race for a control player even under tremendous pressure, and because she has vigilance, can hold a halfway decent lead even as she creates it.

Call of the Herd

Call of the Herd is one of the strongest cards among the timeshifted reprints. We tend to think of this card as a R/G staple due to decks such as, say, Mike Turian's 2003 US Nationals deck (or, I guess, Joshua Wagener's, given that he won). However, *Call of the Herd* won the most money as part of the Walamies Dumbo Drop deck, a Draw-Go-reminiscent polychromatic control deck that could intuition for Elephants when it wasn't winning with *Morphling* or setting up some kind of Whispers-jealous combination of *Impulse*, *Tithe*, *Brainstorm*, and *Fact or Fiction*.

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This card is as efficient as it is versatile, as beloved as it is absurd. *Call of the Herd* will stall Boros beats in the early game and close from 20 in a control long game. It is a uniquely *green* take on card advantage, two efficient creatures wrapped up into a single card, equally at home attacking next to *Kird Ape* as defending from it. Look for this card to show up in mid-range R/G decks that would rather have card advantage than *Burning-Tree Shaman*, and out of the sidebar of control decks with *Gaea's Blessing*. You will find both implementations near the small numbers at the end of the room at your local Champs tournament in a couple of weeks.

Dragonstorm

The first and, for Standard, most easily broken of the new-old crop's combination pieces, *Dragonstorm* may just find a home in the current format. Look for this card to make *Lotus Bloom* into the kind of fearsome threat that its Vintage ancestor can sometimes be. Beware the *Dragonstorm* player who doesn't show you his *Lotus* until the second turn, when he can also show you *Infernal Tutor* first, and then play not one but two. With those bits of jewelry firing on the same turn - and probably a short turn like five where the 'Storm player can set up one additional card - you're pretty much dead. What can the typical control deck do? Counter *Dragonstorm*? You are still facing three *Bogardan Hellkites* and are probably defending yourself from five life.

Because Storm *the mechanic* is a trump strategy against control in the abstract (you can't *really* counter *Dragonstorm*), *Dragonstorm the strategy* makes tactical life difficult for the kinds of opponents that can actually offer up resistance to a combo deck. Do you counter *Lotuses* as they start coming into play? Repeal them on upkeep? What about *Seething Songs*? Are those threats too? Maybe the cagey opponent is walking you into a tapped-out death-trap.

Enduring Renewal

Infinite combo anyone?

The original *Enduring Renewal* Extended deck Fruity Pebbles ran a three-card combination of *Enduring Renewal*, *Goblin Bombardment* and either *Shield Sphere* or *Phyrexian Walker*. With the first two pieces in play, the Pebbles player could play a zero, sacrifice it to deal one point of damage, and get that zero back with the *Enduring Renewal* for rinse-repeat action until the opponent was dead. Later, *Necropotence* and *Academy Rector* were added to make *The Skull Catapult*, essentially the same combination deck but with *Necropotence* setting it up in the way that only the greatest card advantage engine of all time could.



Today, we have *Enduring Renewal* but no *Goblin Bombardment*. Because of that, the Pebbles combination needs a little tweak for Standard. You can substitute *Nantuko Husk* for *Goblin Bombardment* and make an infinitely large attacker in the classic way using *Ornithopter*. This is easily foiled with a blocker, at least for one turn, so another option might be to play *Wild Cantor* and *Grapeshot*. Play the Cantor and sacrifice it for Red or Green mana. You can repeat this process any number of times with *Enduring Renewal* in play, so that the Cantor is essentially paying for itself. When you have played 20+ or even one million repetitious spells in a turn, *Grapeshot* should be lethal due to the high Storm count.

More even than *Dragonstorm*, *Enduring Renewal* is a strategy you have to stop before it gets started. Against an aggressive deck, there is almost no reason why the opponent can't run out a turn three or four *Enduring Renewal* and cross his fingers. If he gets the untap, aggro is basically dead to *Grapeshot* Storm the next turn.

Gaea's Blessing

The return of *Gaea's Blessing* was momentarily offensive to me, but I got over it and am back to putting this card into every possible blue deck, including Mono-Blue Snow splashing off of *Highland Weald* and *Coldsteel Heart* only. Really, *Gaea's Blessing* is the bluest green card of all time: Rather than being a trademark, say, 8/8 for five mana, this Sorcery is an elegant recursive tool, costs only a single and eminently splashable mana from the hated and filthy bestial *Forests*, and draws a card. Very efficient. Very blue.



Gaea's Blessing is the quintessential strategic card. You can look forward a dozen turns and select what you want to shuffle back into your library so as to forward a strategy with no short-term end point (unlike "blind" recursive cards like **Feldon's Cane**, which shuffle up everything). For example, you can just keep shuffling two Counterspells and a **Gaea's Blessing** and win with nothing but two **Gaea's Blessings** as your victory condition, exhausting the opponent over the course of the long, long game. You can shuffle in card drawing and thin your library *forever* until it is a lean package of two **Lightning Helixes** and a **Gaea's Blessing**, burning your opponent's creatures, eventually pointing at *him*, and doing this forever as your two green spells continue a loop. You might not realize this, but you can shuffle three of your *opponent's* cards in the graveyard away to disrupt his reanimation strategy and still get one off the top yourself.

The reason I had a bad initial reaction to this reprint - especially given how much I loved **Gaea's Blessing** way back when - was because I felt like we had *moved on* ... and nobody likes to be wrong. **Gaea's Blessing** had left us with the Extended rotation three or four years ago. We had embraced **Krosan Reclamation** and others, and forgotten the long blond tresses of Rebecca Guay's mottled illustration, the perfection of burning a card on turn two, staying even on turn twenty. But now? It's 2006 and we see that

blue card all wrapped up in a green cloak, and what are we but teenagers again? We hadn't moved on. We had merely forgotten. Here she is now, her claws in us, digging up old wounds and memories, leaving us more efficient, sure, but raw too. She's got us. She always had us. We're kneeling on the forest floor again, pledging our honor to some tree, pretending that - like our library - it is going to last forever... But when she leaves Standard two years from now... What then? How can she do this to us again?

"We'll always have Extended," she whispers, cheek against our shoulder.

Always? Bah! You'll just leave me again. There will be some "rotation" to clean up the format and I'll be twiddling my thumbs. Will I be *drawing a card*? You witch! I'll be a spoiled child again, cast out and desperately trying to relearn the alphabet or remember how to crawl. Why couldn't you have left me with Odyssey Block? **Krosan Reclamation** and I were happy! Damn you, **Gaea's Blessing**. Damn you!

"We'll always have Extended," she whispers, cheek against our shoulder.

Psionic Blast

I mentioned this one last week, but it bears repeating. **Psionic Blast** is going to be a huge addition to Standard, and the secondary market is already buckling under the price of this reprint.

The obvious application of **Psionic Blast** is teaming up with **Mouth of Ronom** to defend Blue Control, but let's not forget that U/G/R is one of the top *aggressive* decks in the pre-**Time Spiral** format. Red just lost **Flames of the Blood Hand**... Might **Psionic Blast** step up to fill that role?

One of the few vulnerabilities of the U/G creature decks over the years was that they had awesome drops and some of the best synergies, but they could lose to utility creatures or fall short on damage in the late game. **Psionic Blast** is the plaster for the Swiss-cheese holes in U/G, acting as **Time Walk**, **Skred**, and **Pulse of the Forge** all in one. Might we see a tag team with **Wild Mongrel** at Worlds?

Shadowmage Infiltrator

I was at Jon Finkel's palatial SoHo apartment a few months ago working on our book when one of Jon's friends stopped by to pick something up. His friend asked what we were working on and Jon told him a little about **Magic**. His friend was shocked to learn that Jon - whose mantle is covered in his old trophies - *actually had his own card*.

"Was it a good card?"

"Well," Jon replied. "It could have been, except they printed it in the same set, at the same cost, as another creature that was basically better in every way. So I guess 'no.'"

We had a chuckle and thought that was that.

It looks that, just like Jon himself, **Shadowmage Infiltrator** is going to try for a comeback after a long absence from serious **Magic**. Not only is there no **Psychatog** to steal Jonny's thunder, but with Dimir mana, the **Shadowmage Infiltrator** has an even better chance of playing **Ophidian** than on his initial release.



Unlike a lot of the cards on this list, I'm not *certain* that **Shadowmage Infiltrator** is going to swing for the fences. It might in fact be less important to the format than a card like **Assault // Battery**. Unlike a solid and flexible card like **Thornscape Battlemage** or **Assault // Battery**, a solid role player, a key sixth man, **Shadowmage Infiltrator** is in the set to be a *star*. He has a giant contract, and if he hits the floor, a lot will be expected of him. We're not sure. Playing him in a field of **Lightning Helixes** and **Stalking Yetis** might be a gamble... But if he drives to the other side of the floor... if he connects... It'll be **Magic**.

Tormod's Crypt

This list is supposed to focus on Standard cards, but I had to get one question in there...

What did *Nimble Mongoose* ever do to anybody?

I understand that in recent years the graveyard has gotten a bit out of hand. *Life from the Loam* Extended decks and particularly Friggorid have become like a new Ravager Affinity. No one wanted to face Friggorid, but at the same time, developments in Extended like Gifts Rock showed the ability of *Leyline of the Void* to stem the spent-card juggernauts.

Tormod's Crypt will probably not be a significant addition to Standard, but it is the kind of card that any aggressive deck can run in Extended. Given adoption of this card and *Leyline of the Void*, it is possible that Friggorid &c. are just *done*, without even one year of butt kicking under their Golgari-bolstered belts.

Ironically, *Tormod's Crypt* just makes the *previous* hated offensive deck, Affinity, better both in the metagame and - at least potentially - in the abstract... *Tormod's Crypt* is like a *Llanowar Elves* that might play *Mind Twist* but might also finish the game to the tune of five damage.



Void

The first time around, *Void* was a good card that got played (sometimes) and had value both in B/R and more extravagantly colored decks, but was often relegated to sideboard slots or ended up being cut entirely. The card is strong to be sure... It breaks up decks with short mana curves, and you will be hard pressed to find a more versatile Signet-smasher. *Void* for four destroys Solar Flare's strategic flashpoint, taking out *Wrath of God*, *Persecute*, and *Zombify*. *Void* for three kills every *Court Hussar* in play and pulls every *Mortify* and *Compulsive Research* in hand. Boros will not easily weather a *Void* for two... Not only will most or all of its creatures in play go down, crushed under the stomping foot of a planeswalker's battle suit, but no *Lightning Helix*, *Volcanic Hammer*, or follow-up *Ronom Unicorn* in hand survive the turn. None of these are the reasons that *Void* will be vitally important to the Rakdos-friendly control decks of *Time Spiral* Standard.

In order to win tournaments, *Void* is going to be set to eight.

Eight?

Eight?

How else is a deck that relies on *Black* and *Red* removal supposed to halt a 6/6 flying, trampling, Legendary Angel with protection from both those removal colors?

Cruel Edict will kill her sometimes, but *Court Hussar* will be a bugger, and if the opponent has another Akroma in hand? Death might not come for a couple of turns, but she'll be waiting, ready to bust out at first opportunity. *Hit // Run* is miserable against a deck with so many Signets.

Eight.

Eight!

Whispers of the Muse

I have *Whispers of the Muse* rounding out the Top 10. Last week I talked about why this card will see a huge amount of early adoption in control. Now I am going to throw a monkey wrench in that plan.

As good as *Whispers of the Muse* is - *and it's good*, both on turn one and on turn six - modern Standard is not going to be the safest place to tap out for buyback. In the control mirror, *Whispers* used to be trump. Now there is a *five*-mana spell that might make it suicide. Against the wrong blue deck, tapping for *Whispers* at the wrong time might mean the opponent gets to resolve *Teferi, Mage of Zhalfir*. As good as these ten timeshifted playables are, not one has the sweeping command over Standard that *Teferi* will. *Teferi* is the breaker in control and the breaker *against* control. *Teferi* turns off all of beatdown's tricks and is a finisher that Draw-Go can run like the *Winding Canyons Steel Golems* of old, a 3/4 played on the opponent's turn.

Scared yet?

Blue should still *play Whispers of the Muse*. It will be played and should be good at Champs. If you are blue, just be careful when you are playing it and what you are playing it into.



Coollest Reprint: Avoid Fate





Originally, **Avoid Fate** was an Interrupt and defended Green's cards from Interrupts. If you don't know what an Interrupt is, be happy, and suffice it to say that the old version of **Avoid Fate** might save your creature from, I don't know, getting Laced, but the current one, with Instants substituting Interrupts, can save your guy - in mono-green mind you - from a **Putrefy**. You can stop **Annex** or **Wrecking Ball** on a land, too. Functionally speaking, **Avoid Fate** got an upgrade like no other Timeshifted reprint.

As such, this card is much better than I originally thought it would be. Obviously, **Avoid Fate** got picked because it is one of the very few Green spells of its type. I bought a playset in 1994, because back then I was interested in blue land destruction, green **Counterspell**, red **Millstone**, or whatever weird take on a regular strategy I could attempt (rarely successfully), so it still has a warm and fuzzy spot in the cobwebs of my **Magic** infancy. Seeing it again is like reacquainting yourself as an adult with a kid from grammar school you were never really friends with, but whose mom was friends with your mom or something, and realizing he grew up to be pretty cool.

Most Embarrassing Reprint: **Cockatrice**

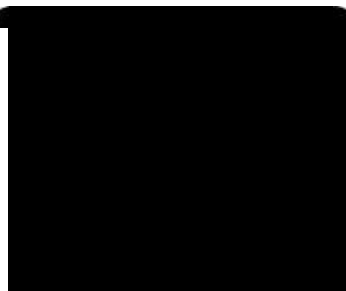
Ironically, this doesn't go to **Squire**.



Cockatrice may be the only card in the history of **Magic** to be functionally inferior to card to which it is strictly superior. Neither **Cockatrice** nor **Thicket Basilisk** is going to be setting any efficiency records. If you want to spend five mana for either 2/4, your opponent is probably going to let you in for two a turn and be happy to do so. The difference is that because **Thicket Basilisk** *doesn't* have flying, you can profitably put something like **Lure** on it and kill a team, whereas **Cockatrice** just flies in wishing he were somebody else.

The Jon Becker Personal Gripe: **Disenchant**

Disenchant is the kind of card that rocks my reality like **Gaea's Blessing**. You know the story. Boy, born into wealth, is destroying artifacts and enchantments at instant speed for 1*. His dad has a gambling problem, or his crooked housekeeper runs away with a Haliburton full of bearer bonds, and the boy's family is thrown into ruin. The boy grows into a man, working, defying the privilege of his early years, learning to get by without those advantages, skimping on the artifacts sometimes, or leaning on friends of another color to help him out. The reprinting of **Disenchant** is like that boy's life. He looks back, now a man, to see that his mother (who was never very good at math) has won with a scratch-off lotto ticket. His little sister, rather than having to pull herself up and callous her hands,



gets to grow up a princess, borne on a sedan chair with little fairy wings glued to the back of her ballerina costume. If an artifact or enchantment gets up in her grill, she just taps two mana and *Poo!* it's gone. No four-mana jank for her. No sorcery-speed *Grasp*. No begging at effin' *green's* door for help when the *Debtors' Knell* tolls. The boy is happy for his little sister. He's happy that after years of toil and making a man of himself he gets to reach into his pocket and tap a little 1* himself if the need comes... But he never forgets - he jealously never forgets - that his little sister never had to learn.



Mike has been a leading voice in the game's strategy for as long as there has been a **Magic Internet**. He is the former editor of *The Magic Dojo* and a sometime Pro player. *Michael J. Flores: Deckade*, is a compilation of Mike's first ten years of strategy and theory (i.e. before he joined **magicthegathering.com**), and is available at <http://www.top8magic.com>.



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