

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns

Shifting into High Gear

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
Friday, October 6, 2006



We are in a bubble of slow time for the purposes of this column. The Week That Was has been pretty slow as **Magic** hangs in a weird little limbo waiting for the last suspend counter to be removed from the new and old *Time Spiral* goodies that go on sale... any minute now. Things get going full speed this weekend with a buffet of events that will appeal to almost any **Magic** palette.

For those of you who either missed your (sometimes not-so) local Prerelease or simply can't get enough of the timeshifted goodness, there are release tournaments going on all over the world at the retail-store level. Looking for a local tournament? You can find full schedules [here](#).

The format for these events is the same as Prerelease weekend – one Tournament Pack and two boosters of *Time Spiral* – and players have a chance to not only win additional boosters of the new set but life counters produced exclusively for these tournaments. On top of that, everyone who attends will receive a special foil **Sudden Shock** for attending the tournament.



If you have never played in a Sealed Deck tournament, I suggest you peruse the Limited Information archives (especially [this Scott Wills column](#)) and my past Prerelease primers for some suggestions about how to prepare for 40-card competition. My quick-and-dirty primer for playing in Sealed Deck tournaments is as follows:

1. Stick to 40 cards with 17 or 18 lands whenever possible. There is no reason to play more than 40 cards. If you must play more cards...play more lands.
2. One of the mistakes new players make is to put too much emphasis on one- and two-drops. One-drops need to do much more than simply attack for one to make the cut in your 40-card deck. **Magus of the Scroll**, which has an ability that makes an impact long after the first turn, or **Sidewinder Sliver** that can come down early AND will affect all your other Slivers, are fine one-drops. Generally if does not kill something or make your opponent's life difficult, you don't want a one-drop. **Sage of Epityr** should not make the cut.
3. Play colors that offer you creature removal. Sealed Deck is a creature format and if your deck can't deal with the opposing army, you are going to have problems. This does not automatically mean you should play red and black but you generally want to have at least one of these removal rich colors in your deck. Keep in mind that a card such as **Temporal Isolation** counts as removal.
4. Your goal should be a two-color deck with a reasonable spread of creatures across your creatures costing between two and six mana. Evasion (flying, shadow, unblockable, etc.) is always a plus, but since evasion and removal are often in opposite sections of the color pie you may need to dip into a third color for a suite of removal. Try to keep the cards in your third color to a single colored mana cost. For example: **Sulfurous Blast** is harder to splash than **Rift Bolt** and **Strangling Soot** is much more splashable than **Sudden Death**.
5. There are always exceptions to all these rules, but if you at least keep them in mind while building your deck you should end up with a much more effective experience.



If you already know all this and are clamoring for higher-level competition this weekend, you should head over to the Tournament Center and [find your nearest PTQ](#). The Pro Tour-Geneva season starts Saturday all around the world. Like the release events, the format will be *Time Spiral* Sealed Deck with a *Time Spiral* Top 8 Booster Draft. There are prizes for all the Top 8 competitors and the winner gets a free trip to Geneva, Switzerland this February.

Wizards of the Coast recently updated their Invitation Policy in regard to the Geneva season. Normally if you're Level 3 in the Pro Players Club, you aren't allowed to play in PTQs. Wizards is relaxing that rule for players who haven't achieved Level 3 for the upcoming season. For example, during the 2006 season a Level 4 Pro Tour Players Club member has only 14 points in the 2006 Player of the Year standing. That player is eligible to play in a Pro

THE FINE PRINT

Here's how the change shows up in the invitation policy:
Players with a Pro Tour Players Club level 3 or higher are not allowed to participate in Pro Tour

PRODUCTS

MAGIC ONLINE

MESSAGE BOARDS

MAGIC General Forum

magicthegathering.com Forum

RULES

Tour Qualifier for Pro Tour-Geneva that takes place in the 2006 season (as Pro Tour-Geneva is held in the 2007 season.)

Players looking for a little sealed practice might want to check for Friday Night **Magic** and release events in their area. Somewhat harder to find may be crucial draft practice for the eight players who advance at each event. I have been fortunate enough to do a handful of drafts and I can share a couple of quick archetypes that I have been successful with so far.

Without a doubt, the best deck I have drafted so far was red-blue control with morphs, fliers, removal, and card drawing. This particular deck did have a little helping hand from a rare card that I played with for the fun of it but turned out to be quite amazing.

Qualifiers. Exception is made for any Pro Tour Qualifier which awards an invitation to a Pro Tour in a subsequent Tournament Season. In this case, only players whose current Player of the Year standing is currently less than the Pro Tour Players Club level 3 requirement (currently 20 points) are eligible to participate in a Pro Tour Qualifier.

Blue-red Control		
Time Spiral Draft -- I really mean 40 cards		
Main Deck 40 cards		
10 Island	1 Basalt Gargoyle	1 Careful Consideration
7 Mountain	1 Bogardan Rager	1 Foriysian Totem
17 lands	2 Brine Elemental	2 Mystical Teachings
	2 Coral Trickster	1 Spell Burst
	1 Dragon Whelp	1 Sudden Shock
	1 Fathom Seer	1 Sulfurous Blast
	2 Looter il-Kor	1 Temporal Eddy
	1 Spiketail Drakeling	2 Think Twice
	1 Venser's Sliver	1 Walk the Aeons
	12 creatures	11 other spells

I had one match with this deck where I managed as big a comeback as you can muster in this game. I was up against a sliver-iffic opponent who had just tapped out to play **Might Sliver** and sent in the team. I had been somewhat mana flooded in the early game and had almost twice as much mana in play, with only two morphs to show for it. I chump-blocked one of his creatures with one of my morphs and was reduced to one life. With damage on the stack I unmorphed to reveal **Coral Trickster** and tapped down the **Might Sliver**.

I untapped and sent in my surviving morph, revealing **Brine Elemental** to lock down his team for the following turn (he took his first damage of the game and went to 15). He fell to 10 on my next turn after taking his turn without the benefit of an untap step thanks to Briney. He would never take another turn as I cast **Walk the Aeons** with buyback and finished him off from 20 while 'stabilizing' at 1 on my side of the table.

One of the most important things I learned from drafting this deck was that there was an even better color to pair blue with than red. My two **Looter il-Kor** were fine in this deck as card selection to rip through my deck, but they are much better as card advantage. They become madness outlets in blue-black to power out your **Dark Withering**, **Gorgon Recluse**, and **Nightshade Assassin**. **Tolarian Sentinel** is a fine addition as a cheap madness outlet that also lets you recur your **Nightshade Assassin**, **Pit Keeper**, and **Riftwing Cloudskate**.

If you are getting the madness cards but the blue madness outlets are not coming your way – the Looter is a first-pick kind of card – you can also look to **Greenseeker**, **Urborg Syphon-Mage**, and **Trespasser il-Vec** (the latter two work just fine in the blue-black version as well). Green-black madness has been a fine deck for me, although it is harder to pull off.

That barely scratches the surfaces of the format – I will leave the deeper exploration for upcoming Noah Weil columns – but you can easily draft decks around rebels, slivers, removal, madness, card drawing, or any number of strategies. Good luck this weekend to the Top 8 players at each PTQ.

For those of you not patient enough to wait for Noah to dissect the format in the coming weeks, I would advise periodic trips to the Tournament Center this weekend as blisterguy breaks down all the action from Grand Prix-Sydney. Day One will be Sealed Deck and you can expect an opening feature with one of the top players on the planet on how to attack a *Time Spiral* sealed deck (and the timeshifted craziness contained within). Day Two will be draft, and counting the Top 8 draft you should get an over-the-shoulder view of two to three drafts during the coverage.



Other Tournament News

- **Gold Tier Tournaments:** With Arena fading from the Organized Play scene, there appears to be a number of retail level tournaments popping up to replace it. I will have plenty of details next week on the soon-to-be-

announced City Championships which will award invites to U.S. Nationals and byes to Regionals. But until then, you'll have to be satisfied with the upcoming Gold Tier Tournaments. These are 67 tournaments being held at specified retail locations throughout North America. The events are going to take place Oct. 13-15 and have an array of prizes exclusive to these tournaments. In addition to the usual booster pack prizes – including a box of *Time Spiral* to the winner – there is an exclusive backpack being awarded to each winner along with a certificate commemorating each winner to be displayed at the site of their victory. Top 8 participants all earn fancy *Time Spiral*-themed deck boxes, and participants receive a foil **Powder Keg** (while supplies last).



There's quite a collection of goodies available as prizes at Gold Tier Tournaments.

- **Champs:** Depending on what part of the world you live in, *Time Spiral* will make its crash landing on Standard over the next two to three weeks. While most locations are on hold until the weekend after Pro Tour-Kobe, a few European locations will be holding Champs in just two weeks. Bookmark the Tournament Center for current Standard tech over the coming month.
- **Pro Tour-Kobe:** It will be interesting to witness the impact of no *Time Spiral* drafts on the *Magic Online* Beta. Players will have to rely on good old-fashioned testing where they actually have to draft in person. While it may be good practice for their social skills, it will not offer the level of repetition that many of the Pros have grown accustomed to over the past few Limited Pro Tours where there was Beta access. With the Player of the Year race so closely bunched together and so many players vying to reach critical Players Club levels, Pro Tour-Kobe is sure to be a hotly contested tournament.
- **Magic Online Worlds Qualifier:** Expect to see more on this in Frank Karsten's column over the following weeks but since the preliminary events began Thursday...it seemed like a good time to call these out. Each year for the past few seasons *Magic Online* has awarded one all-expenses-paid trip and invitation to World Championships via an online qualifier. As I said, the preliminary events began October 5 and will run through October 11. There will be 32 such prelims and the Top 8 players from each of these 3x events will be eligible to play in the online Standard qualifier on Saturday, October 14 with 6x prizes. No prize will be bigger than the free trip and lodging to Paris, France for the 2006 **Magic: the Gathering** World Championships this November.

Happy Hunting!

Five Questions with Sheldon Menery

With the flood of new (and old) cards coming into play this weekend, I thought it would be wise to check in with Level 5 judge Sheldon Menery to tackle a few topics before players headed to release tournaments, PTQs, Grand Prix, and whatever other sanctioned events they might find themselves at this weekend.

1. PTQs and GPs with Time Spiral start this weekend. What are the key things that a player needs to know heading into these tournaments?

Sheldon: They need to know that there are more cards than normal, some of which they've seen for years, some they haven't. There are more mechanics in *Time Spiral* than in any set in history. It's going to be a great deal to keep up with, especially for the less-experienced player.

2. What challenges does Time Spiral present from a judging perspective?

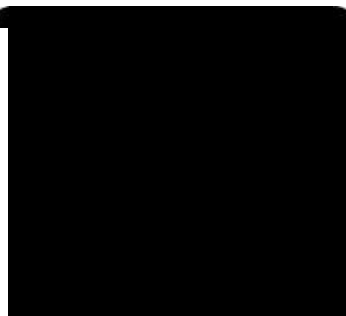
Sheldon: Since the players have more to handle, the judges then have an order of magnitude more to handle. Judges at the Prereleases had their hands full with player questions; it'll likely be the same with the start of the qualifier season. That said, to good judges, challenges mean opportunities. This presents judges with an unprecedented chance to teach players and less-experienced judges about all the cool new (and not-so-new) mechanics. And since there are so many cards, I'm sure some combos and interactions have yet to be discovered.

3. How will players have to deal with Split Second? If I am scared of my opponent using a split second card and I want to maintain priority to cast another spell or use another ability, how should I announce that to avoid confusion with my opponent?

Sheldon: You need to specifically tell them that you're keeping priority, especially if you're thinking about your next action. Announce your spell or ability, and then specifically say "And I'm not passing yet" or some such.

4. What do people need to know about morph?

Sheldon: It's not an activated ability, so Split Second won't prevent you from turning something face up. Morph is a static ability that lets you turn the creature face up any time you have priority; the action of doing so



doesn't use the stack. If something triggers off of an un-Morphing, then it will follow the normal rules for priority.

5. *What is your favorite timeshifted card and why?*

Sheldon: Nicol Bolas! It opens up the Elder Dragon Highlander format to new players, and that's always exciting. That, and Ovinomancer, since I own the original art. Who doesn't like sheep tokens?

Firestarter: Something in Commons

I have always relied on commons to dictate my Limited strategies far more than rares, even going so far as to infamously pick **Glacial Ray** over Kokushu. What do you think the top three commons in each color are for *Time Spiral* Limited? What are the commons that will send you into a color if you see them second- or third-pick in a draft? Use the forums to share your thoughts on the subject.



Brian David-Marshall has been involved in Magic since 1994 when he was violently shaken by someone searching for the game. He has organized tournaments, run a store, and is currently the Pro Tour Historian. His latest venture is Top8Magic.com, the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Brian David-Marshall](#) archive

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Inside Wizards](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#) | [Sitemap](#)

© 1995-2007 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

