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# Delayed Imminence

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*Limited Information*  
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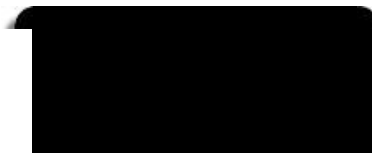
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RULES

Welcome to Suspend week! This time we're going to look at one of the most interesting and powerful of *Time Spiral's* new mechanics. And, I'm pleased to announce, this format *does not* contain **Remand**, so suspend is a major player. This week will be an evaluation of suspend for Limited and a look at how to maximize its offerings in the game. We'll look at the numbers for the creatures, then wrap it up with a few scenarios.

The first thing to investigate with suspend is whether it's a device that actually saves you mana. Yes, the suspend cost is generally less than the cost in the upper right corner. The more relevant question is how suspending a creature compares to just playing a land every turn for the normal cast. When you compare suspend with normal mana progression, how does suspend stand up? Let's examine the difference with **Durkwood Baloth**.

Normal Mana	Suspend Counters
1	5
2	4
3	3



4	2
5	1
6 (in play)	0 (in play)



We can see that if you make your land drops at a steady pace, the Baloth comes into play at the same time whether it's suspended or hard cast. That's certainly not the whole story, though.

Playing a land on turns 1–6 is pretty optimistic. Even assuming you'll hit six on six, that's a lot of mana to play with. Most limited decks can do whatever they want with that much mana. If it's not one big spell, it's a double morph, or a creature plus **Fortify**, or a better Storm count, or whatever. The pyramids weren't built in a day, but you could get awfully close with six mana. Whatever you want to do with your mana, by the time you have that many lands in play, your options are pregnant. Playing a 5/5, while strong, is merely one possibility.

Contrast this with turn one mana. After playing the first land you can:

- Play **Greenseeker** or **Icatian Javelineers**. Decent.
- Mana burn for one. Now you're in their head! Pretty bad.
- Play **Locket of Yesterdays**. Worst-case scenario.

Alternatively you can spend that single mana to set a card aside for later. Regardless of any other play over the next turns, you know that in X upkeeps your big monster or big spell will come out to do your **beating** bidding. That's a nice end result for utilizing a turn no one touches.

Crafty readers may have noticed there is still another suspend benefit: the creature comes into play with haste. I admit, I'm not precisely sure of the flavor of the granting of haste here. Maybe being spit out of the temporal channels grants a type of rocket-shoe aura to the now-corporeal creature. Perhaps it's the aftereffect of the *peine forte et dure*, where the creature is so happy to be released from the weight of all those pennies it goes on a tear. I don't know the answer, that's not my department. What I do know is that the haste ability completely tips the scales towards the suspend half of the equation. With the table above, they both come into play at the same time, but only through suspend will the creature attack on that turn. That's roughly the equivalent of playing the card a turn early, or if you prefer, saving an entire mana. However you want to slice it, suspend is a very good deal.

From this model, we can see why **Errant Ephemeron** and **Duskridler Peregrine** are even stronger versions of suspend inaction. These two have completely reasonable costs for their stats and abilities, yet based on their mana costs to suspend costs, suspend shaves off an effective two mana. That's highly potent to the limited player, and is the reason **Errant Ephemeron** is blue's best common and the **Peregrine** is white's second best uncommon (on or around par with **Griffin Guide**). **Ivory Giant** also saves an additional mana in addition to the haste-suspend bonus, but as a 3/4 for seven it's a touch overcosted, undermining your savings. It has the suspend bonus as well, although as a rare and a creature requiring two different colors to RFG, he's not a factor very often. There's one other creature with the additional suspend bonus, and that's the rare **Pardic Dragon**. We'll talk about him later. For the most part, the creatures that gain an extra benefit beyond the standard suspend advantage are very powerful, and should be treated as such. What about the ones who fall on the other side?



There are currently three such creatures whose suspend cost is higher than the normal casting. They're **Deep-Sea Kraken**, **Greater Gargadon**, and **Nantuko Shaman**. Of these, the Kraken and Gargadon *shouldn't* come into play in their nine or ten turns. With the Kraken, if they happen to not play a spell for that many turns, I like your chances way before you need another 6/6 to finish them off. The **Greater Gargadon** is



extremely well-named, because I'm becoming more impressed with that creature every time it comes down. Creatures are going to die, and when they do, you get to pop off a counter. Lands become extraneous over time, and the Gargadon gives you a way to give them one last hurrah. Before the year is up I fully expect to see a player tap a mountain and sac ten permanents to hastey in nine points for the win. In limited, that's not beyond the realm of possibility.

That leaves **Nantuko Shaman** as the odd bug out, the only common creature that will definitely, 100% come into play later with suspend than a normal casting. In fact, it comes into play a full two turns later via suspend than by the cost in the upper right. Your reward for your patience is a drawn card, a not-insignificant advantage in limited. Which version is better? It's certainly not automatic either way; like all suspend cards, both styles have merit. The 3/2 for three mode is completely reasonable for its stats. In a lot of formats **Nantuko Shaman** would be cast early, good for six points of damage. Unfortunately, *Time*



*Spiral* contains morph, a mechanic that allows any color ample opportunity to block and kill the Shaman. In fact, ever color has common creatures that can straight up trade with the Shaman, making it unlikely that it will be good for early damage very often. If they're mana-light or you have a hand of removal, an early **Nantuko Shaman** can certainly crash through for lots of damage. That will be the exception though, rather than the standard. The suspended version gives you a 3/2 **Kavu Climber** effect on turn five, which sounds reasonable until you throw that haste into the picture. **Kavu Climber** was already a very respectable creature in a draft deck. Being able to effectively cast the 3/2 version for four mana makes it quite powerful. In the late game, you'll miss the point of toughness and not gaining the card immediately. However that's a small price to pay for the flexibility and power this card offers in *Time Spiral*. This guy gets suspended a lot, and it's only been that annoying **Coral Trickster** or the evil **Mana Skimmer** that prevent genuine card advantage. I'd say with my own experiences it's been 80/20 of suspend to other, and I've been very happy with the results.

So far we've seen mana efficiency and tempo advantages in favor of suspending. Are there any cons for suspending? Yes but they're not as pronounced as you may think. The biggest drawback to suspend is giving your opponent information on precisely what's coming and when. That gives them extra data on when to hold removal, when to use combat tricks, counterspells, and the like. A player seeing **Errant Ephemeron** coming in two turns knows he can tap out from now until then, since his **Cancel** is earmarked for the 4/4 flying beastie. The advantage to the suspending player is that of misinformation. When you have a creature you *really* want to live, suspend something to draw their fire, then play **Jaya Ballard**, **Task Mage** or a **Stronghold Overseer**. Depending on the quality of your suspended creature, it living might mean you're good to go for anything else you want to play. Suspend gives your opponent some information, but how they use that is definitely something you can work with. In practice though, things usually don't go that deep. You'll play suspend creatures to maximize your mana, bump up your storm count, and generally keep the pressure on your opponent. Knowing its purpose, we can best evaluate how and when to use the suspend cards.



Before we get to the scenarios, I'd like to talk about **Phthisis**. Of all the suspend cards, **Phthisis's** applications seem to be the most thought provoking. "When should I suspend this?" is always preceded by "Can I ever suspend this?" It's a tough puzzle, since its effect is so powerful, albeit double-edged. Actually the card in general concerns me a bit. Not for its power level, even though anyone on the receiving end feels a nasty sting. No, I'm just concerned that Creative has decided that obscure medical terminology is fair game. I taste synesthesia on the horizon...

The reason **Phthisis** is so interesting and complex is that it's extremely modal. You can suspend or hard cast **Keldon Halberdier**, but it's going to end up doing the same thing at the end. **Phthisis** is very different. It can be cast directly for a hefty seven mana, requiring a whopping  $\text{♣♣♣♣♣}$ . This is its most powerful version, clearly tough to pull off. If there's a chance you can cast it the hard way, then you have a very powerful swing card on your hands. The massive life loss coupled with an opponent losing their best creature, no strings attached, is an extremely potent effect. People have lost after hard casting **Phthisis**, but it's rare.

The suspend version is more interesting and far easier on the mana. When deciding whether to suspend this, you just need to determine how likely **Phthisis** is to hit an opposing creature, and if it doesn't, how okay

you are with that. A slowly resolving **Phthisis** is telling your opponent they shouldn't put their best foot forward for a number of turns. If that means not playing any creatures at all, you're probably ok with that. If it means holding off their quality guys and playing weak dudes that chump block or get hit by the **Phthisis**, you're fine with that too. The benefit to the suspender is the game being seriously altered for a good five turns. If you can use that time to your advantage, it's definitely worth the risk of a little card loss. The most elegant use of **Phthisis's** suspend I've seen yet came from Wizards of the Coast's own Michael "Elf" Feuell.

With his opponent at 16 life on an empty board, Michael played out **Phthisis** with the five time counters. His opponent simply kept his spells in hand, waiting for the **Phthisis** to wind down with no target. Michael too played nothing up until **Phthisis** had a single counter left. Inexplicably, Michael then played a **Fury Sliver**. This was a perplexing move for the opponent, since **Fury Sliver** was the only creature out and therefore the lightning rod for the incoming **Phthisis**. The opponent drew his card and passed back, not wanting to lose any creatures or waste any removal on the soon-to-be dead Sliver. After all, if Elf played a **Sprout** to draw **Phthisis**, the opponent could kill it before **Phthisis** resolved. Elf untapped and aimed the resolving **Phthisis** to his **Fury Sliver**. In response to the target, Elf tapped four and cast **Stonewood Invocation!** Split second guaranteed resolution, countering Michael's own **Phthisis** and allowing 16 points of unblocked, uncontested damage in for the win. Michael not only used the suspend to slow down the pace of the game for a while, he also guaranteed his creature staying alive for the critical turn. A great move, and a nice lead into the final portion: a few simple suspend scenarios.

## Scenario 1

It's your main phase on turn two. Neither player has mulliganed, and you're playing first. Your opponent has a tapped Forest in play and a suspended **Search for Tomorrow** with two time counters on it. You control an untapped Mountain. Your hand is: Mountain, **Pardic Dragon**, **Prismatic Lens**, **Blazing Blade Askari**, Swamp, and **Strangling Soot**. What's your move? Click [here](#).

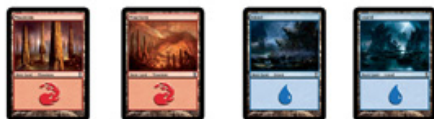
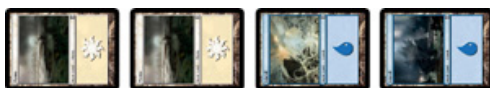
Your options are Swamp, Lens or Mountain, Lens. The **Pardic Dragon** might say it has suspend, and it might *look* like you can in fact suspend it, but you really shouldn't. I'll be honest here, I've never seen a suspended **Pardic Dragon** go well for anyone. Ever. The math is pretty simple: When you would want to suspend it, they have lots of spells in hand. When they don't have spells in hand, you have lots of mana. **Pardic Dragon** is great as a 4/4 flying firebreather; it should just come into play the natural way.

In this instance, the patient course is even clearer. You have some mana acceleration and removal to get you to the later game. They have a suspend card that's guaranteed to put another counter on your **Pardic Dragon**, as well as leading into turn after turn of being able to play whatever they want. You're going to have a bit of a fight coming up. There's no reason to make it harder on yourself by throwing away a perfectly good creature, effectively forever. Suspending **Pardic Dragon** is a trap for the greedy.



## Scenario 2

It's the beginning of your main phase. Your opponent controls two face-down creatures, two Plains, and two Islands, all tapped. You control two



Mountains, two Islands, a face-down **Fathom Seer**, and a **Furiysian Totem**, all untapped. Your hand consists of **Stormcloud Djinn**, **Rift Bolt**, Mountain, **Word of Seizing**, and **Errant Ephemeron**. What's your play? Click [here](#).

In this instance, I would play the land, cast the Djinn, and suspend **Rift Bolt**. Suspending the **Rift Bolt** does three good things for you: It's guaranteed to target an opposing creature, it might keep a good creature off the board for a turn, and it maximizes your mana. Between the **Fathom Seer**, Djinn, **Word of Seizing**, and **Errant Ephemeron**, we can see this deck's mana is going to be tied up for a while. Those morphs are not the best creatures in the opposing deck, but you don't care about finding the perfect target. Your fliers are going to put you in a race situation, and that Bolt is a nice cushion. Use the **Rift Bolt** now, on the cheap, so you'll have mana turns later for Totem activations or bigger fliers.

## Scenario 3



This is your opening hand after mulliganing to six, on the play, game one: 3 Forest, 2 Durkwood Baloth, and a Penumbra Spider. What's the move? Click [here](#).

The obvious play here is to go turn-one suspend, turn-two suspend, as opposed to a second turn double-suspend. The obvious play here is the correct one, but it's a lot closer than some people would think. Aligning your suspend cards is very powerful, since it forces your opponent to handle (at least) two cards at the same time. Most threats and responses are played on a 1:1 basis. You play a guy and they handle it, or they play a guy and you handle it. Two large creatures coming into play at the same time, with haste, throws the tempo well in your favor. This is especially true when you still have your mana to protect your guys or clear the way. For creatures of this size especially, the main way to deal with them is a double or triple block. Putting two into play at once makes the mega-block plan that much harder, practically guaranteeing you at least five points of damage.

I asked this question to a number of people, and almost everyone agreed turns one and two suspend was the way to go. Everyone did agree that simultaneous suspends was more likely to deal damage, even if it was less likely to deal *more* damage. As a few people were quick to point out, you can always skip attacking with the first Baloth for a turn. Dealing five points is just too much damage to risk skipping an opportunity, which is why suspending on turns one and two is the way to go here. However, for something of smaller size like Viscerid Deepwalker, I may make special effort to get them into play at the same time, to maximize their effect on the board.

It's an interesting puzzle, and I have a feeling these kinds of questions won't be resolved for a while yet. We'll see how the pros tackle the suspend issue, and all the other complexities of *Time Spiral* limited, at Pro Tour – Kobe this weekend.

That's it for now, but I have a request for the readers. If there are any questions you want answered, send them in via the e-mail link at the bottom of the page. I'll collect the most interesting ones and post the answers in a future column. Try to keep your questions within the bounds of this column's focus, or at least things I could answer. If you want your question considered for the upcoming article, mail them in by October 26 and include a first name. Good luck to all the Kobe competitors, and thanks for reading.

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