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Quick Hits: FWBW

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 Limited Information
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hello everyone, and welcome to Wizard Week! I had a bit of trouble deciphering something on-theme, until I remember that I talk with sorcerers every day! You lovable planeswalking wizards have sent in some great stuff. This week is going to be dedicated to answering a percentage of some of the more intriguing questions I've received in recent weeks. Some of the things here are a little off Limited Information's main premise, but they're diversions, and I promise, this kind of subject matter will be a rarity. Next week is firmly centered on *Time Spiral* Limited. For now, please enjoy.



Q: I have a question that I have never seen addressed before. What happens if you look at a pack that is a bit of a toss-up with a choice between good cards in 2 or 3 colors, but there's one color that only has one card, is it worth drafting that one card (as long as it's playable) in order to cut that color?

For the record, the pack had Eron the Relentless, Wheel of Fate, Grapeshot and Keldon Halberdier in red, Premature Burial, Mindstab and Cyclopean Giant in black, Spell Burst, Screeching Sliver and Slipstream Serpent in blue, Ivory Giant, Return to Dust and Momentary Blink in white, and Brass Gnat, but Savage Thallid was the only green card.

I figured Eron has to be better because of haste and more controllable regeneration, but wouldn't it be worth taking the Thallid to control green in the first pack? Thanks for your help
 -Daryl B

A: The classic signaling question. Never addressed before? Maybe not this week. Anyway, if the cards and color strengths are *totally* even, then the color that's least represented is a decent tiebreaker. That particular situation is actually quite rare though. For pick 1, pack 1, I usually just take the best card and don't worry too much about signaling. It's a factor, especially when choosing a second color, but I just don't like passing genuine strength that early. You won't know if the person on your right took a card in your colors anyway, forcing you to switch, so you may as well take the strongest card available. In the later packs things can be more complicated. In this pack I would have taken Eron, and, ironically, that **Savage Thallid** would probably table.

Q: How do you rate the Signets?
 -Brian W.

A: Excellent, relevant question Brian! Signet rankings are one of the more important evaluations one had to contend with from the tricky *Ravnica* Block. Before we get to the meat of the question, I want to go into further detail the concept of Limited card evaluations.

When we talk about evaluations and card strengths in relation to each other, or to the set as a whole, we're really just using a bunch of short cuts. Rating, ranking, strength; all these equate to how functional a card is, how applicable a card is, how efficient a card is, and all the other criteria we use to judge a card we're deciding whether to include or exclude. It's a schema, or mental shortcut, but a useful one. Evaluations help by giving us quick knowledge in a timed (draft) situation. It also gives us more understanding of a particular environment by having a numeric device to compare with other people. By defending your decisions, and listening to others' views, everyone gets a keener grasp of the cards and sets in question.

For example, let's look at **Errant Ephemeron**, a card that I believe is the best blue common in *Time Spiral*. I think this creature is the best because it's large, it can come out early or late, and it's evasive. It has an impact at all stages of the game, and it requires an answer very quickly. Of the other blue commons, **Looter il-Kor** comes closest, and in a blue-black madness deck it may indeed be number one. However, I prefer Ephemeron because it's just so inherently powerful and can be used in a pinch for defense as well as offense. Its versatility and strength is why I believe it's number one.



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I can use this analysis with every card and color and get a general idea of where cards rank, as well as impressions on the set in general. The point of the exercise isn't to be dead-on right, but just to get thinking about how these cards play out and interact. Now to Brian's pointed question, from best to worst:

Izzet Signet

Blue loves to get to the point where its late game card advantage spells overwhelm an opponent. This card both gets you there and lets you cast those extra cards. In addition, the Izzet model is particularly good because with replicate, multiples of **Izzet Signet** strictly translate into extra cards or damage.

Dimir Signet

Black is the second color of late game advantages, so having the mana to play either half of these hungry colors is quite appealing. With transmute, extra mana lets you search for and play a particular card in one turn; a nice move. This Signet helps you pull off exactly that.

Orzhov Signet

The first non-blue color makes sense here. Black-white has been a historically slow combination. Adding a boost to your development certainly has merit. In addition, black-white has a high interest in color specific cards; getting both double-black and double-white mana is very important. Finally, Orzhov is so dry in *Guildpact* you'll take whatever you can get. This one looks pretty good when you have to choose between the artifact, **Restless Bones**, or **Skyrider Trainee**.

Azorius Signet

Similar to the Dimir, the Azorius mechanic involves spending mana without losing a card in hand. It's ranked slightly lower because blue-white is faster than blue-black and black-white, and hence needs the extra mana slightly less, but the principles are the same.

Rakdos Signet

In addition to decently strict color requirements, the Rakdos have a vested interest in getting cards out of their hand. A cheap artifact that lets you play other cards faster fits that plan nicely.

Simic Signet

While green provides extra mana, Simic is a color that appreciates all it can get. **Simic Signet** is useful alone for giving you turn three **Assault Zeppelid** capabilities, but when you think of how often Simic is paired with Izzet, you realize adding any extra mana into that combination looks very good. The one reason it didn't go higher is that the green-red-blue is so full of power and curve, there's actually not much room for extra mana sources, and Izzet is the better version.

Golgari Signet

Another green guild, and therefore full of extra mana availability. Astute readers may note that the final four combinations are either green-based, Ravnica guilds, or both. Golgari, at the end of *Ravnica Block*, was a fairly weak guild. The best G/B combination went with red, and that combination didn't really need Signets to perform, it just needed removal and/or large creatures. You'd take this, certainly, but unless it went very late, your deck was in trouble from a lack of good *Ravnica* picks. Aside from Boros, this combination provided the weakest double-splash cards. An adequate card, just not particularly relevant.

Gruul Signet

Gruul Signet was sunk by its reliance on the early game. Green-red decks really want a two drop of some sort, so much so there wasn't time to cast this Signet. It was okay if you needed filler, or had a ton of **Burning-Tree Bloodscale** types, but hopefully your G/R decks didn't pack many of this one.

Boros Signet

Straight Boros was an awesome strategy in *Rav-Rav-Rav*, but those days are long past. Even then, though, this Signet was a weak alternative to a Guildmage or **Thundersong Trumpeter**. Nowadays Boros is paired with Rakdos, but like before, you'd almost always rather have a two-drop than a Signet. Like all the Signets, you play it if you have to, but you're definitely not eager to play this one.

Selesnya Signet

Not only is this Signet found in the weakest color combination, it also comes attached to a color that packs its own mana-boost mechanic. Hopefully this Signet is for your white-B/W/R, to splash that **Moldervine Cloak**. Straight green-white isn't looking too interesting these days.

Q: I saw your name attached to various Pro Tour and Grand Prix coverage. How do I get involved with that?
-Evan S.

A: Not able to speak for anyone else, but my road to coverage was rather simplistic, although fairly time-consuming. I played and wrote and played and wrote. I kept doing this until I was a part of the community. Then one Grand Prix, I don't remember which one, I offered my services to the person running the show for day two. He had seen my work before, knew I was competent with **Magic** situations and English, and took a chance. There was no compensation involved, I just wanted to be involved in the process. I took some constructive criticisms and improved my writing on the feature matches, all the while making myself available to whatever venue I was at after playing. Eventually I developed a reputation as someone competent in the field and got

invited out to locale, which is where things are now. In the short term, my advice is to just keep playing and writing articles for the independent sites. Do it long enough and someone will notice.

*Q: What are your thoughts on **Clockspinning**? This card seems like it does it all!*

-Various

A: **Clockspinning** has two strikes against it: It's mana hungry, and it might not do anything. Let's look at the second reason first. **Clockspinning** either removes a counter from one of your cards or places one on theirs. Removing time counters from your stuff isn't bad and, as people have pointed out, allows you to spring forth a surprise blocker. The problem with this plan is simply one of optimism. You need to have a creature suspended and in this case with one, maybe two counters left. They need to be attacking, but only with a creature that can be blocked by the suspended creature, *and* they need to have no removal or bounce before your now-corporeal creature gets engaged in combat. And this is all so you don't get card disadvantage with a card that helps a mechanic that intrinsically resolves itself normally.

So what about their creatures? It's kind of appealing to buyback lock a guy out of the game forever. The only problem with that plan is again one of likelihood. You're spending four every shot, a turn's worth of mana. If you have that much mana to throw around, something's gone badly with your draw. You're also not paying attention to the other creatures they cast, or developing your own board. And if you happen to have four or eight mana to toss in the very late game, why exactly is their card suspended anyway? By that point, they can just hard cast the thing.

Now with all that, there still could be some potential, especially if it lets you put counters on a Spike or Thallid-type. My final issue with **Clockspinning** is that blue is a rather mana-hungry color in *Time Spiral*. **Fathom Seer**, one of my personal favorites, both cuts into your mana and gives you more cards to cast. **Looter il-Kor** loves to pitch excess land so you can play more business. These are common, staple cards in blue decks that don't give you much breathing room for excess mana. Again, if I have four mana to spend for transient effects, something's gone very weird.

Now with all that, **Clockspinning** is not unplayable. I simply find the time it's likely to be relevant and castable in a very short window. The only time it has even mildly worked for me was a G/U control deck with lots of spore counters and the like. I would only play the card if I was almost guaranteed to hit something each turn and I really had nothing better. Considering the depth of *Time Spiral*, that's a rare scenario. Like **Fool's Demise**, it's a card I *want* to like, but it's just not useful often enough to be worth it.

Q: Good luck in the [Great Designer Search](#)! You may inspire more interest in the contest by talking about the process in your column.

-Kenneth N.

A: My inclusion in this (awesome) event has been a great honor and a lot of fun. As a few people have mentioned, there's been a little issue with my status as a Wizards of the Coast contractor. While it's been said that my inclusion in the contest came from design and essay skill (I firmly believe this), my position as weekly columnist could in theory give me an opportunity to promote my position or interests. That's definitely not going to happen though, for a number of reasons. For one, this is a Limited column. People who are reading here each week do so to learn different takes on Draft or Sealed. I certainly have no wish to proselytize the GDS when there are people who have no interest in its outcome and, further, don't want to spend time reading something so vastly off-topic.

Furthermore, I *enjoy* writing about Limited! *Time Spiral* is a very fun, very deep set that deserves plenty of attention. I have no interest in skipping that opportunity, even partially. Finally, no other contestant has access to this site's audience or resources, and if I took advantage of that somehow, it would certainly be an unfair advantage. Everyone is welcome to submit articles to the independent sites, and in fact a number of the finalists have done so in the past. That's even ground, but here, Limited Information is going to stay pure. This will probably be the last GDS mention on these pages, but for the record, thank you to everyone who has given their support. I truly appreciate it.

Q: Who do you think you're fooling by saying all those things about Suspend/Slivers/Forecast/Snow-Covered/etc? I know you're just paid to say praises about the new stuff. You're so full of #\$\$#!

-Various

A: I don't get this kind of letter often, but there's usually one person per set review who sends out something along these lines. Allow me to set the record straight: if I say I like a mechanic, I honest-to-gosh like it. If I don't like something, I certainly won't pretend otherwise. No one here has ever asked me, or to my knowledge any writer, to actively deceive their audience. We might be wrong of course, but that's a far cry from deception. The editor of [magicthegathering.com](#), Scott Johns, is rather adamant about the writers giving their honest perceptions of a topic. He believes that the writers doing their own thing makes for more interesting and genuine reading. Besides, I don't like everything. To give you an example, I cannot stand **Shadow Sliver's** name. It just bugs me to no end. If they had named it Astral Sliver, it would have had a cool little inside nostalgia. "**Shadow Sliver**" is just so...transparent.

*Q: (In regards to [Delayed Imminence](#)) As luck would have it, I played a *Time Spiral* booster draft Tuesday night and my first two draft picks were **Greater Gargadon** and **Pandemonium**, in that order. I hate to say, but Suspend didn't get me anywhere. I lost every game.*



D'Avenant Healer
 Children of Korlis
 Flickering Spirit
 Foriysian Interceptor
 Gaze of Justice
 2 Icatian Crier
 Momentary Blink
 Resurrection
 Greater Gargadon
 Pandemonium
 2 Clockspinning
 Aetherflame Wall
 2 Blazing Blade Askari
 2 Ground Rift
 Keldon Halberdier
 2 Goblin Skycutter
 Viashino Bladescout
 Jhoira's Timebug

Safe Haven
 Terramorphic Expanse
 2 Island
 7 Mountain
 6 Plains

Disregarding for a moment my lack of removal, I like to think I had decent defense and plenty of offense. I even had measures to protect/reanimate my good creatures (Momentary Blink, Resurrection), all the better if Pandemonium is in play. Long story short, Pandemonium only came out once, Gargadon was suspended in three games, but only made it out in one. Pandemonium ultimately netted me 6 damage (a Keldon Halberdier and 2 citizen tokens) before it was destroyed. Maybe I'm just unlucky, but I was never quite able to get all the pieces out at once, and overall, suspend didn't do much for me...
 -Greg

A: I'm not illustrating this for any kind of mockery, but to show a very common reaction with the new mechanics, and game play in general. Greg's deck has some issues, starting with an early-pick Pandemonium and two Ground Rift and ending with 15 mana-producing lands (just too few even with an Expanse). Now you'll note that Greg blamed his misfortune on two things: suspend not working out, and bad luck. Both of these are possible explanations on why things have gone wrong, but they're less likely than a person might think (especially in suspend's case). It's a neat trap to fall into, to blame your losses on luck or some other kind of non-responsible cause. Had Greg asked, "What did I do wrong here?" I would have illustrated this letter as an example of a great question to ask yourself and others. But Greg dropped the L-Bomb, and so precluded an opportunity to learn from his mistakes. Yes, luck will always be a part of the game, but blaming your losses on it means you'll always be at its mercy. I don't have the probability background to go into more detail here, but somehow when you play better you get less unlucky.

Q: *The text from Nantuko Shaman is:*
 "When Nantuko Shaman comes into play, if you control no untapped lands, draw a card."
But the untap phase comes before the upkeep.
So you if you are to draw that card you need to play a spell that uses your mana.
So it's bad right? -William A

A: William also falls into a couple of traps here. The first is rather obvious, misreading Nantuko Shaman. How many people at pre-releases, or even higher, give away games because they don't read a card in detail? There's an acronym I'm not going to use here, but the gist is pretty clear. A card might be good or poor, but how will you know unless you know what it does?

William's second error is a little more subtle. He goes out and asks someone how good or bad a card is. In regards to Nantuko Shaman, I say it be some good. Yet what if I'm wrong? Is William going to always play the card because someone told him to? I have no problem giving my opinions on various cards, and the forumites are sure to throw their own feelings into the ring. But people make mistakes with evaluations all the time, and the only way to see if a card is really as good or poor as they think it is to give it a try yourself. If you have instincts that contradict someone's opinion, the other person just might be the one in error. One pick to discover an underrated or overrated gem seems worth it to me.



Q: *I would like to play better but I find my play inconsistent, furthermore, I cannot find a consistent period of time to practice like any other people. Is playing better all about consistent practice? It certainly is a lousy feeling to play at PTQ qualifiers and see scorn in the spectators' eyes when I misplay or fail to recognize a strong board. [Did I go to the wrong level of competition?] Thanks for listening.*
 -Lim-Beng T

A: Another classic. The answer is of course another question: How interested are you really in playing better? If you're very interested in improving and attending a Pro Tour, definitely surround yourself with the highest

competition you can muster. Attend a Grand Prix if it's possible. After you're at these events though, you need to do more than play. You need to observe players, especially the winning ones. If they make a play you didn't understand, talk to them about it after the game. If you see "scorn" with observers, ask them what you missed during the game. And of course, feel free to disagree with anyone's analysis. So in answer to the question, if you aren't able to have consistent practice, make sure the time you do spend is maximized towards learning. Even if you do have consistent practice, make sure you do it with people of talent. If you're trying to improve with people who need help as much as you do, the highest level you can reach is just above them. That's not good enough.

Q: Hello, My name is Reg, I have been playing Magic for about 7 years total. I have a friend who has played the same basic deck switching out newer versions of older cards to keep it tournament legal, and I was wondering could you do an article about making an anti-version of her deck? Her deck is a red burn and blue flyers deck.

Thanks
-Reg

A: Reg's question is slightly off-topic for *Limited Information*, and I can't really devote an entire column to one reader's trouble with his lady. Normally I'd pass this by, but for some reason his plight has moved me. So for the first and last time in *Limited Information*, one 60-card deck for my pal Reg.

The Reg Special	
Main Deck 60 cards	
7 Forest	4 Choke
8 Plains	4 Circle of Protection: Blue
1 Rath's Edge	4 Circle of Protection: Red
4 Selesnya Sanctuary	4 Glaciers
2 Temple Garden	4 Heroes' Reunion
1 Tendo Ice Bridge	4 Honorable Passage
23 lands	1 Rishadan Pawnshop
	4 Tropical Storm
	4 Wallop
	1 Whirlwind
	3 Wing Snare
	37 other spells

Good luck, buddy.

Q: I had a very difficult decision last week: Soltari Priest or Tivadar of Thorn. Which would you choose?
-Andy W.

A: Andy, I've got to go with the Priest here. Tivadar is fine, but his effect on the game (blocking red creatures mostly) is so easily replicated by other cards, especially in white. *Soltari Priest's* role as a two-power evasive is harder to find elsewhere. The Priest is not invulnerable, but as far as white's game plan is concerned, it fits in well. Take the card whose effect is more relevant and harder-to-find.

Q: No love for the Shadow Sliver?
-Various

A: *Shadow Sliver*. The sliver that gives slivers shadow. Sigh.

Oh, I'm sorry, you were asking how good *Shadow Sliver* is in limited? Not very, I'm afraid. Most of the Slivers in *Time Spiral* are fairly costed. Spinneret, Gemhide, Pulmonic, Basal; these are all Slivers that have perfectly acceptable mana costs for their stats and abilities. *Shadow Sliver* falls woefully short. You would expect a 1/1 unblockable to cost two mana. At three mana in blue, 2/2 fliers are the norm. As such, *Shadow Sliver* gets the short shrift. As far as the spreading ability is concerned, why not let the forum posters speak for themselves?

Posted by Qwyrxian:

"The problem with *Shadow Sliver* is that it doesn't play well with the sliver strategy that Noah's outlining, which is a slow build up of increasingly more powerful slivers. As soon as you drop *Shadow Sliver* in a dedicated sliver deck, you can only race, as you will have slim to no blockers. And slivers lose a lot of races. Additionally, getting shadow knocked out by instant speed removal can literally destroy your entire army, as your army instantly becomes blockable again."

Posted by Kyrna:

"*Shadow Sliver* is definitely a double-edged sword. It may make your slivers unblockable, but it also makes them unable to block. It might belong in the sidebar (where it will likely remain), but unless you get incredibly lucky, it shouldn't be in the main deck."

Posted by temparus2000

"*Shadow Sliver* is indeed a bad idea. At best it is unneeded overkill, at worst it can turn your attack into a one-sided Wrath...As is, *Shadow Sliver* is most useful if you AREN'T playing slivers (other

than shadow sliver) and your opponent is. It's actually an excellent anti-sliver sideboard card, provided you drop it early. Few sliver decks can win without good early defense."

I like everything, and I especially love the idea of sideboarding **Shadow Sliver** against the opposition. Smart people.

For the final questions today, I'll turn to an excellent three-parter by a gentleman named Alexander.

Q: 1) *With small utility creatures, when does it make sense to play them early and when to wait to maximize their CiP abilities? Examples would be creatures like the **Pit Keeper**, the **Gravedigger**, the **Battlemages**, the **Viridian Shaman**, the **Absolver Thrull**, and many others. When should they be played as 2/2s that stem the opponents' beatdown (or initiate that of my own), and when should they be held to maximize their potential? Likewise, how often should morphs like the **Coral Trickster** be played early vs. being played via the slow morph route with a hope of using their unmorphing abilities later in the game?*

2) *How sparingly should one use creature kill spells? Normally, there are around 3-5 of those per Limited deck, so one should expect to draw 2-3 of them during the game. A typical situation is when an opponent is swinging in with a 2/2 evasion creature, and I am sitting on a kill spell with a bigger damage potential, like a **Lightning Axe** or **Disintegrate**. What's to do: to kill the little guy immediately only to feel sorry for a wasted spell when a real monster shows up a few turns later, or to hold my hand in hope of drawing a more appropriate kill spell and risk letting the life loss of 2 a turn to slowly accumulate and eventually cost me the game?*

3) *A more subtle situation is when the kill spell is "appropriate" but I know the opponent's deck includes a pumping or a utility enchantment that he might want to give to his "bear". Shall I wait trying to lure the opponent into a two-for-one -- and keep bleeding two a turn -- or shall I kill the "bear" immediately only to risk seeing the enchantment being attached to his next creature? The situation becomes even more complex when the enchantment can be flashed in response to my kill spell, like the **Aether Web**. Shall I hold on or strike as early as possible, to minimize his chances of drawing the enchantment? Thanks a lot!*

-Alexander B.

A: 1) This is actually a very common scenario in Limited, yet it still has no easy answer. The short version is that whatever a creature is more likely to do is how you should tend to use them. For example, **Viridian Shaman** would rarely kill an artifact in 9th Edition limited, so playing it out as a 2/2 for damage would be the most likely way to make it relevant. In *Mirrodin*, the Shaman killing an artifact was practically guaranteed, so using it just for damage was a serious waste.

The slightly longer version asks how a game is likely to proceed, based on your mana expenditures and their colors. **Coral Trickster** is great as a two-drop if your turns 3-6 are spent doing other stuff. Or, that **Assassinate** in your hand means **Coral Trickster** has extra value as a tapper, especially as the mana works so well there (three to cast, four to flip plus cast the black sorcery). **Absolver Thrull** looks a lot better against a B/W/R deck in Ravnica Block than a G/U/B deck, as the former's often packing Fetters and **Pillory of the Sleepless**. Unfortunately, waiting around to cast the Thrull with a target could give them such a life edge your little advantage is lost anyway. You can see how it's a tricky situation. My *guideline* is to generally deal damage, but try to come up with a scenario that lets me maximize the specialty creature when possible, as long as it doesn't too badly inhibit my overall game plan. For example, if I had double **Pit Keeper** in hand, I'd be more likely to play the control route and start trading creatures off. If there were no other guys around, I'd send the Keepers into the fray without any qualms.



2) Win or lose, try not to feel sorry for your play. If something didn't work, analyze why not and move on. No one gets everything right. In regards to your question, I like to wait on removal as long as humanely possible, as long as I can do other things with my mana or I won't have to kill the creature anyway. With random 2/2s, I can just throw guys in the way, or better still, attack so much they're forced to put their guys in the way. But if they have something like a 3/3 flier that I need to kill, that's it. It has to go down. I'm not going to wait around for a better target, because all that would mean is that I have to kill both. Simply put, the more of your cards that trade with theirs, the less you have use your primo stuff. However, if you really do need to throw out your best card, don't hesitate. The goal is to avoid the situation in the first place.

3) If you can trap them into a 2:1, that's worth quite a bit of risk. However, most quality players won't make their biggest threat an even bigger target. For example, let's say my opponent has out **Durkwood Baloth** and I'm sitting with **Lightning Axe**. I could wait until he untaps and taps to attack, since that maximizes my chance of him playing a **Verdant Embrace** or something before combat. Realistically, he's not going to risk losing his best cards to one kill spell. What is more likely is him casting **Might of Old Krosa** on the Baloth in response, and then I'll be taking seven instead of five. Had I played the Axe on my turn, I could have killed the Baloth while he was tapped out, or at the very least, saved myself two points of damage. By the way, don't get greedy with your big combat stuff. Spreading out your damage is a fine way to go, as long as you're doing something. For an example of avarice in action, check out Game 3 [here](#). Thomas played **Bogardan Rager** with its ability targeting his **Fury Sliver** instead of the other unblocked creature. The Sliver got **Temporal Isolationed**, and Thomas lost all kinds of damage potential. The rule is, if you genuinely have a creature worth stopping, that's all you really need.

Thanks to everyone who took the time out to ask such great questions. I hope this little foray into the inbox has been an enjoyable one. Next time, the much-requested *Time Spiral* walkthrough. Have a good week, and thanks for reading.



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