

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Time Spiral Q&A

Aaron Forsythe
 Latest Developments
 Friday, November 10, 2006

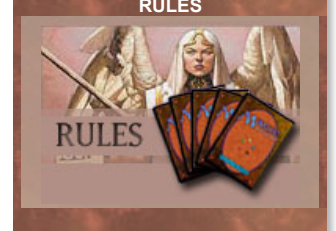


This article - a series of Q&A on *Time Spiral* design/development - was meant to use emails from a variety of readers. I began answering questions sent in by Matthew Lubich, and by the time I was done answering what he asked, I had enough material for an entire column!

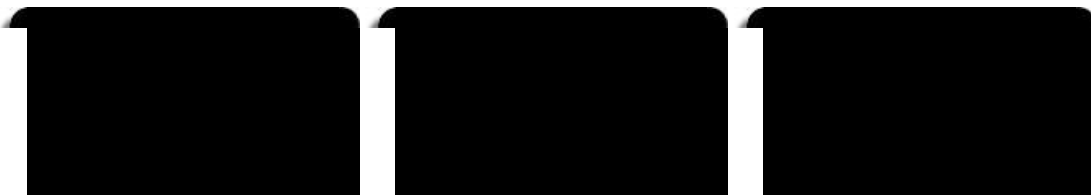
If anyone else has question about this set, drop me a line using the email link at the end of the article. I'll hope to answer them - along with any from the first batch that I didn't get to - in a subsequent column.

But for now, here are most of Matthew's most excellent questions:

When designing the super-cycle of suspend cards, how did you determine which spells to use? I realize that they are all powerful spells from the days of yore, but there are other strong spells, why these ones?



Matthew is referring to the six rare suspend cards with no mana costs (Restore Balance, Ancestral Vision, Living End, Wheel of Fate, Hypergenesis, Lotus Bloom). Each of them is an homage to older cards that have been deemed "off-limits" for power-level reasons and/or being on the Reserved List. The inspirations for these cards are Balance, Ancestral Recall, Living Death, Wheel of Fortune, Eureka, and Black Lotus.





When Mark Rosewater was sketching out the cycle initially, he wanted two things to be true for most of the cards we chose to copy: (a) They were too powerful to print normally, and (b) they'd created interesting play decisions if suspended. All six meet the first criterion (**Living Death** comes closest to being costed correctly, and it's still an absurdly powerful card. It is, for the record, the only one of the six old cards that we're still allowed to print.) Four of the six meet the second criterion; both players are forced to play the game differently with the threat of an imminent **Balance**, **Wheel of Fortune**, **Living Death**, or **Eureka** looming. **Ancestral Vision** and **Lotus Bloom** don't quite measure up in that department, but their predecessors are quite possibly the two most powerful and famous cards ever printed, and we felt it important to make newer versions of them in this set.



Concerning the timeshifted **Tormod's Crypt**, why did you make it Standard and Extended legal again? To me, **Tormod's Crypt** seems to be one of those powerful hosers that you don't like printing often since it not only hoses some of *Time Spiral's* mechanics (flashback, threshold), but *Ravnica's* (dredge, haunt) and *Coldsnap's* (recover). This isn't to say I mind the crypt, I just wonder if there's some sort of story behind its return.

We always want to have safety valves in place in all formats, and **Tormod's Crypt** is exactly that - a safety valve. We knew the graveyard was an incredibly important zone in Extended, and we wanted to make sure people felt like they could fight back. In Standard, we knew that Akroma (the ideal *Zombify* target) and *Call of the Herd* (the best flashback card) were both coming back, and good answers might give people some sense of hope against cards like those.

There is this perception that cards like **Tormod's Crypt** invalidate whole strategies, but we are pretty certain that isn't true. The Crypt is legal in Legacy, yet threshold decks are incredibly powerful and win tournaments in that format all the time. And just look at the current [Standard at Champs](#), for instance - Solar Flare decks that put Akroma and *Angel of Despair* into play via reanimation did incredibly well. And Haakon, *Stromgald Scourge* has even started appearing in successful decklists, all in spite of **Tormod's Crypt** being legal.

One of the reasons I found it to be a compelling card to reprint was because I anticipated exactly the kind of reaction it got: people would think we were insane and irresponsible for crippling the environment with it, when in reality that just wouldn't be true.

I realize that **Sudden Spoiling** is in reference to **Sorceress Queen**, but was there some debate as to referencing that or doing a white version as homage to **Humility** and **Humble**?

Sudden Spoiling was the last card put into the set, whipped up when, at the eleventh hour, all of our collective rules-minded people finally gave up - after months of trying - on making a split-second **Word of Command** work within the rules and fit on a card. At that point the card was locked in as being black, and had art already, so white cards like **Humility** and **Humble** never came up in the discussion.

I found the card to be a little weird - yes, the "0/2" part was a nostalgic throwback to **Sorceress Queen**, but black has never had "lose abilities" at any point in the game. Regardless of my feelings, the card has proven to be pretty popular.

Do you think we will ever see a blue **Shrink**? I realize that **Bewilder** and **Dizzy Spell** have an effect that makes them more worthwhile, I'm just curious if there are plans for a "vanilla" version, something base set worthy.

I hope so! Blue **Shrink** (Instant, Target creature gets -5/-0 until end of turn) is on my Core Set "wish list," and I hope we can get around to making it some day. Forcing such simple cards into expert-level sets has always proven difficult, however, as expert-level sets are such tangled webs of themes and new abilities that most cards need to be part of the big picture, leaving little room for unthemed simple cards.



This question may be stretching the whole "questions on **Time Spiral**" bit, but I couldn't help but wonder if **Mystical Teachings** and **Strangling Soot** were developed back in **Torment** block, but didn't see the **Light of Day** till now. Were they old cards just recently brought into fruition, or just mere "new ideas" that seemed like they could have come from the black centric block?

They're new ideas, but I'm glad our black-aligned flashback cards feel like they could have come from the black-aligned set that also featured flashback.

In reality, the cycle of off-colored flashback cards began life as *hybrid* cards, back when hybrid had been kicked out of **Ravnica** in development. So **Mystical Teachings** cost 3 hybrid and had a flashback cost of 3 hybrid. When **Ravnica** wanted hybrid back, we simply changed the cycle to have off-colored flashback. After all, hybrid says it's okay for either color to have the effect, as does off-colored flashback.

I noticed on **Jhoira's Timebug** it specifies that you could add or place a time counter on a permanent you control. There are currently no permanents from **Time Spiral** with time counters, and I doubt you planned it to interact with **Time Bomb**, **Tourach's Gate**, **Infinite Hourglass**, and **All Hallow's Eve** since they're not in the timeshifted cards, so were there once plans for cards in **Time Spiral** to have time counters?

Good eye. Yes, there were some permanents with time counters on them at various points in **Time Spiral** design and development. And yes, it's true that currently the "permanent" part of the Timebug has nothing to do in this block. But there are still two sets to go...



In regards to **Time Bomb**, **Infinite Hourglass**, **All Hallow's Eve**, and **Tourach's Gate**, were any of them in the timeshifted cards at one time?

Tourach's Gate and **All Hallow's Eve** are both on the Reserved List, so they were never considered. **Time Bomb** never came up as an option either in any of our discussions. **Infinite Hourglass**, though, was in the actual set itself for a period of time, before we decided that the main set should have no reprints. Once taken out, it couldn't compete on the coolness level with the artifacts that are in the "timeshifted" set.

Was **Ertai's Meddling** the original inspiration of the **Saviors** mechanic that became **Suspend**? Will **Ertai's Meddling** get an update to give a spell "Suspend X"?

Ertai's Meddling was not the inspiration for the mechanic, but once the similarities between suspend and the Meddling were realized, it helped guide us in our attempts to make it work.

Suspend initially came from the idea of making "legendary sorceries" as a natural continuation of **Kamigawa's** Legend-heavy theme. Because sorceries are never in play, the normal legend rule is meaningless when applied to them, so capturing the idea of "legendary spells" had to be done in a new way. The **Saviors** design team came up with suspend, with the idea that a legendary spell might be one that takes several turns to cast. In the end, they chose to use the "epic" mechanic to portray legendary spells, leaving suspend for use in later sets.

For some reason I can't remember, Mark Gottlieb insisted **Ertai's Meddling** could not be templated using suspend. Now that I reread its Oracle wording, though, I'm not sure why. I'll have to bring that up prior to the next Oracle update.

Is there any reason you wanted **Paradox Haze** to be an aura? Couldn't it have been "As **Paradox Haze** comes into play, choose a player."? The concept is neat, but I was curious if there was a reason behind it.

Think of it this way...If we have an enchantment that requires you to choose something for it to affect when you play it, what do we call that enchantment? An Aura. Precisely. With **Wild Growth** you choose a land, with **Holy Strength** you choose a creature, and with **Paradox Haze** you choose a player. That templating decision wasn't made to be wacky or groundbreaking; it was done simply because the Aura subtype does exactly what we needed the card to do.

This seems kind of strange to ask, but couldn't **Sprout** have been the first creature card with the type **Saproling** (Other than the legendary **Mistform**), just with flash? Have you ever thought about printing a creature with a type that normally appears on tokens?

In design, the card was actually a 1/1 Saproling creature with flash called "Saprise." The creative team didn't like the idea of actually making a Saproling creature, as they felt the appeal of Saprolings comes largely from the fact that they are a prominent **Magic** race that exists only as tokens. Not wanting to potentially ruin that coolness, we switched it to an instant that makes a token.



Was **Trickbind** inspired as a working version of **Interdict**? Will **Interdict** be errata to have split second?

It was created as a mix of **Interdict** and **Stifle**. We liked **Interdict**'s "immediacy," but we liked **Stifle**'s ability to stop triggered abilities (most notably the storm trigger).

No old interrupts - not even **Interdict** - will be receiving split second errata, as that is not the exact functionality of old interrupts. Interrupts could be responded to by other interrupts, but split second cards can't be responded to with any spells or activated abilities.

Was there any thoughts of having counterspells that had split second? You know, perhaps a **Power Sink** variant. This is not to say I wanted one, but I wondered if the thought crossed anyone's mind, and if it did, what happened to axe the idea?

The thought certainly crossed our minds. The problem was that the card would be so similar to the **Darksteel** card **Last Word** that we figured it was better for us to find different effects to use.

Is there any reason why only **Coral Trickster** was a new Merfolk and **Viscerid Deepwalker** is the only Homarid? I know people like merfolk, but I like Homarids and I want to see more of them (I would really like to see the type redeem itself somehow and I believe the Deepwalker was a good first step).

The Creative team wanted to pepper **Time Spiral** with as many old-school creature types as possible, all in small numbers. So you get one Merfolk, one Homarid, two Kithkin, one Kavu, etc. I highly doubt that **Homarids** will ever be back in large numbers - for every player like you that likes them, there are a hundred that don't.

Was there ever any thought of putting equipment into **Time Spiral**? I realize that it is entirely "new age" technology in terms of Magic, but wouldn't it have been cool to have some equipment that just reeked of the old "equipment" in how it functioned? Was this why **War Barge** was in the timeshifted cards, and, if so, why **War Barge**?

We talked about having some equipment - specifically stuff that would have been throwbacks to older cards, like Kamahl's sword or "**The Pearl Trident**." In the end, though, we decided we could better present the set as a look at the game's past if we didn't include things like equipment that debuted after the card face change.

War Barge wasn't included because of its similarity to modern equipment, but simply because it was half of an old-school famous combo with **Merfolk Assassin**, who also returned.

I noticed that it seems for every rule you referenced the old color pie (like **Basal Sliver**), you had a card that did it in the correct colors also (In the case of fast mana, **Coal Stoker**), was this intentional? If so, could you explain the reasoning and point out some more examples to some of the other readers? (I realize that some people are complaining about the color pie switching back and I just wanted to point out to everyone that you guys know what you're doing.)

It wasn't intentional, and it probably isn't even true! Sorry! A lot of abilities in this set live merely where they "used to," such as the pinging ability on the blue **Fledgling Mawcor**. We weren't trying to show old and new side-by-side, just old by itself.

Why is **Tivadar** not a Knight? It seems only fitting that he should have the creature type, yet he's only a lord. Was the Future Future League affected by him being a Knight (I'm looking at you, **Haakon**), or was there some other reason?



Although the correlation is not 100%, Knights in **Magic** are most often shown riding mounts. Additionally, in both *Mirage* and *Time Spiral*, creatures with flanking are shown riding mounts. Because of the correlation, all the flankers in *Time Spiral* are Knights and all Knights have flanking (*Moorish Cavalry* and *Sidewinder Sliver* excluded). When the art came in for *Pentarch Paladin*, he was on a horse, and thus became a Knight with flanking. When Tivadar's art came in, he was standing on the ground - no Knight, no flanking.

Last Week's Poll:

Which <i>Time Spiral</i> theme has been the most enjoyable for you?		
Teferi, Mage of Zhalfir	4442	37.1%
Magus of the Scroll	1339	11.2%
Lim-Dul the Necromancer	1321	11.0%
Magus of the Disk	1221	10.2%
Endrek Sahr, Master Breeder	657	5.5%
Mangara of Corondor	634	5.3%
Magus of the Jar	414	3.5%
Sage of Epityr	384	3.2%
Ith, High Arcanist	350	2.9%
Magus of the Mirror	347	2.9%
Drifter il-Dal	255	2.1%
Magus of the Candelabra	222	1.9%
Voidmage Husher	213	1.8%
Crookclaw Transmuter	168	1.4%
Total	11967	100.0%

My omission of *Pit Keeper* was a total oversight. Apologies to all fans of the little 2/1 (yes you, Jake).

This Week's Poll:

How old were you when you first started playing Magic?

<10
 10
 11
 12
 13
 14
 15
 16
 17
 18
 19
 20
 21
 22
 23
 24
 25
 26-30
 31-35
 36-40
 >40

*Aaron Forsythe was a professional **Magic** player and Internet columnist prior to leaving Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to join Wizards of the Coast. His first duty here was Content Manager of this very website, a job that required him to do actual work as opposed to playing games all the time. So when a position opened in R&D, he jumped at the chance. He is now director of **Magic** R&D, and still plays **Magic** in his free time when he's not busy playing **Magic**.*



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Aaron Forsythe](#) archive

© 1995-2007 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

