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The Point of It All

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 Limited Information
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Easter Egg Week? I wasn't really familiar with the practice, Easter being a holiday my family didn't celebrate growing up. A little research revealed that an Easter Egg is actually brightly painted chicken ovum. I'm not sure precisely sure what that has to do with **Magic: The Gathering**, but I guess we can make it work.

Today's topic is the discussion from [last week's](#) Limited pointing exercise. I'll give my scores and explanation, along with the averages of the voting public. As a special treat, R&D member and Limited specialist Mike Turian chimes in with his values as well. To stay in theme, Mike's comments will appear in bright pink.

Once again, the 0-5 rating method used:

- 5.0: I will always play this card. Period.
- 4.5: I will almost always play this card, regardless of what else I get.
- 4.0: I will strongly consider playing this as the only card of its color.
- 3.5: I feel a strong pull into this card's color.
- 3.0: This card makes me want to play this color. (Given that I'm playing that color, I will play this card 100% of the time.)
- 2.5: Several cards of this power level start to pull me into this color. If playing that color, I essentially always play these. (Given that I'm playing that color, I will play this card 90% of the time.)
- 2.0: If I'm playing this color, I usually play these. (70%)
- 1.5: This card will make the cut into the main deck about half the time I play this color. (50%)
- 1.0: I feel bad when this card is in my main deck. (30%)
- 0.5: There are situations where I might sideboard this into my deck, but I'll never start it. (10%)
- 0.0: I will never put this card into my deck (main deck or after sideboarding). (0%)

Castle Raptors

Mike's score: 2.3
 Readers' score: 2.4
 My score: 2.7

Turian: "The percentage criterion is a little tricky here. Clearly if I am playing white I am always playing this card, but I don't find it to be strong enough to be in the 2.5+ range. The best white common in Limited."

Like Mike, I agree **Castle Raptors** is white's best common. I think it's an extremely strong creature and, because of its single white mana, goes into a variety of decks. What really pushes Raptors over the top is that it comes packed with a little tempo boost. As an untapped 3/5, only **Lightning Axe** and **Dark Withering** in the common slot can kill it, and at 1:1 they cost more than Raptors. Otherwise **Rift Bolt** and **Strangling Soot** need to wait until it's tapped, which means the defending player takes three free damage or they forgo playing a card on their turn. Either way, that little bonus makes **Castle Raptors** a star for me.



Spirit Loop

Mike's score: 1.1
 Readers' score: 1.7
 My score: 0.5

Turian: "Spirit Loop has impressed me since its release (originally I gave it a 0.3). The fact that it avoids many of the drawbacks that enchantments have helps this card

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out a lot. At the end of the day it is still a creature enchantment and lifegain, both factors that lead to its final pointing."

That's quite a disparity of scores. I've seen people try to make this card work, but no notable successes spring to mind. People whose opinions I respect have said this card is better than it looks on paper, Mike being the most recent. I see its value as a narrow sidebar card, although I could be convinced it's more flexible than I'm giving it credit for. Right now, **Spirit Loop** doesn't have the chops to get me interested. I'd just rather have another guy.



Evangelize

Mike's score: 1.8
Readers' score: 2.2
My score: 1.8

Turian: "A terrific card versus certain archetypes (red/black) and extra medium versus others (Thallids). A Control Magic is hard to pass by, even if my opponent does get to make the decisions."

I'm with Mike 100% on this one. **Evangelize** usually makes about half my white decks, the determinant being on how much removal I have and how many **Temporal Isolations** I don't. It gets a few extra points because when it works, it *really* works. In certain archetypes **Evangelize** is excellent, but it's not a windmill-slam bomb by any means.



Fathom Seer

Mike's score: 1.9
Readers' score: 2.2
My score: 2.6


Turian: "The fact that he is a morph (and therefore always at least a 2/2) helps his pointing out a lot. He has a great ability in draft and can protect your more valuable morphs just by his presence."

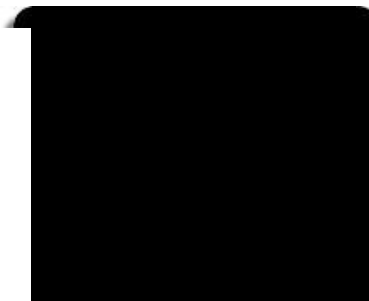
Mike rated **Fathom Seer** pretty low, a score which I disagree with. My estimation of this creature continues to rise, and frankly my 2.6 might be a little conservative. His major strength of course comes from the free morph flip. Essentially **Fathom Seer** lets you play spells and tap out with impunity. Early in the game no one wants to trade a creature for your morph, because the card disadvantage is so severe. Later you can flip it up when the land return doesn't affect your development, and in fact can provide extra mana. It's a really amazing creature. Even though it doesn't directly win a game, it subtly moves a player beyond reach, even if it takes five more turns for that to be apparent. Next time you're with some **Time Spiral Limited**, see how much the tide shifts when a player flips up **Fathom Seer**.



Riftwing Cloudskate

Mike's score: 2.9
Readers' score: 2.5
My score: 3.1

Turian: "The only reason I didn't point this higher (and 2.9 was my original rating) is because of the  in his casting cost. The tempo of being both a suspend card and a Man-o'-War, and the goodness of flyers in Limited, make this guy an awesome Limited card."



A few weeks ago I asked some pros their opinion on the number one blue uncommon in *Time Spiral*. Opinions were surprisingly varied. **Careful Consideration** was a popular answer, but **Fledgling Mawcor** and even **Brine Elemental** had their supporters. My answer, and one some people agreed with, was our friend **Riftwing Cloudskate**. Mike nailed all its benefits perfectly, emphasizing its true strength in relation to *Time Spiral* Limited. The final kicker is that these guys get even better in multiples (scarily so), making me want to draft them very highly indeed.

Draining Whelk

Mike's score: 1.8
 Readers' score: 2.7
 My score: 2.8

Turian: "I moved him up as time has gone on. While not a card for me (reminds me of **Second Thoughts**), there is no doubt he offers a powerful effect for his mana cost. He tricks players because when he is played he looks is fantastic but there are just too many games he doesn't come out."

I'm with the readers here. **Draining Whelk** has been a big hit for me. I can see where Mike is coming from, in that it's a very reactive card and won't necessarily get you out of a losing spot. On the other hand, anytime there's parity or you're even a little ahead, **Draining Whelk** is a gigantic nail in their coffin. In other blocks I might lower the score slightly, but Whelk has a few extra benefits coming into *Time Spiral*. One is storage lands giving you a potential extra push in mana. The second is the suspend creatures giving you the information on when to tap out and when to keep your mana open to make a gigantic flier. And the final boon is the little common **Momentary Blink**. **Draining Whelk** doesn't really need the extra help, but Whelk plus Blink can set up a devastating soft lock while your creatures deal plenty of damage. Which brings up the best *Time Spiral* deck I've drafted to date, this one from a side draft at PT – Kobe:



Momentary Blink Shenanigans		
Main Deck 40 cards		
7 Forest	1 Brine Elemental	1 Careful Consideration
8 Island	1 Crookclaw Transmuter	1 Might of Old Krosa
1 Plains	1 Draining Whelk	2 Momentary Blink
1 Saltcrusted Steppe	2 Durkwood Baloth	1 Search for Tomorrow
17 lands	1 Errant Ephemeron	2 Snapback
	2 Fathom Seer	7 other spells
	1 Looter il-Kor	
	2 Mystic Snake	
	1 Sporesower Thallid	
	1 Thallid Germinator	
	2 Thallid Shell-Dweller	
	1 Viscerid Deepwalker	
	16 creatures	

If you manage to draft two **Mystic Snake** and a **Draining Whelk**, I recommend something similar. Wow, did this deck hum.

Assassinate

Mike's score: 2.1
 Readers' score: 2.6
 My score: 2.0

Turian: "Once again my original rating... Removal is great in Limited, and black has no shortage in *Time Spiral*. The creature needs to be tapped for it to work, meaning that the creature has already accomplished something before death. Being a sorcery also pulls down its pointing. A cheaper **Dehydration** in a color that doesn't need it is why it's only a 2.1."

2.0: If I'm playing this color I'm usually playing these. Maybe, but I'm not happy about it. **Assassinate** has two strikes: the creature gets to hit at



least once, and it doesn't remove blockers. That puts you in a far more defensive position than I like in Limited. It's still removal, and those **Durkwood Baloths** have to die somehow. My score does rise if you can combine **Assassinate** with **Coral Trickster**. As is, I think the reader's score is just too high. Black can do better.

Phthisis

Mike's score: 1.8
 Readers' score: 2.7
 My score: 2.8

Turian: "Much like **Draining Whelk** in that when it works it really works. On turn two and the turn where you get 7 mana (with **☞☞☞☞**) it is amazing. Otherwise it is mediocre."

I've been told I like this card a little too much, and that might be true. If I do, though, the readers share that view. Quad-black is a very hefty price tag, but oy, what a swing. The suspend option is tricky to play correctly, but you can set up a very nice suppression effect if your timing is on. It's that flexible nature, plus the ability to provide a come-from-behind victory, that makes this card a big winner for me.



Sudden Spoiling

Mike's score: 3.0
 Readers' score: 3.0
 My score: 2.9

Turian: "A last-minute addition to **Time Spiral** that is a Limited bomb. **Sudden Spoiling** encourages a certain board state that devastates your opponent when it is achieved. Once again the **☞☞** in the casting cost hurts its pointing slightly, and the fact that if you don't have much else going on it is just a Fog."

In sealed deck this is primo, one you're begging for every time you're in black. In draft it goes down a little bit, as you can pick up decks with so much removal that **Sudden Spoiling** become superfluous. Don't get me wrong though, this card is amazing and can create incredibly bad situations for an opponent. These scores are well deserved.



Coal Stoker

Mike's score: 2.7
 Readers' score: 2.1
 My score: 2.6

Turian: "I was a little surprised when I saw that I pointed him this highly. I think this guy is great. He is a great tempo card (and some amount of mana fixing) that has a nice body in a color that lacks big bodies."

I'm with Mike here. **Coal Stoker** promotes awesome tempo, and works well with Storm. It drops a little bit in Red/Green, but shoots way up in Red/Blue, where going turn-four **Coal Stoker** into Morph is one of the strongest openings available. I think people are being turned off by the risk of mana burn, but considering the upside, it's a risk worth taking. Two spells in one turn is a Limited coup, and **Coal Stoker** makes it commonplace. Depending on the deck, **Coal Stoker** can be drafted just behind **Rift Bolt**.



Conflagrate

Mike's score: 2.5
Readers' score: 2.1
My score: 2.5

Turian: "A solid card that can really tear apart your opponent's team. A little mana-intensive but well worth it."

Cards like these can be tricky to play because they involve an awful lot of juggling of resources to maximize. That being said, the capacities to do severe damage to opposing armies and/or slip in the last few points make this card rock solid. And if you can combine the flashback with **Fathom Seer**, well! **Conflagrate** is a fine addition to any deck and I'm still seeing them go later than they should.



Disintegrate

Mike's score: 4.7
Readers' score: 3.8
My score: 4.7

Turian: "I can't think of when I haven't played Disintegrate when I opened it but I am sure some people pass on it. Totally amazing."

Big Bertha. The boards erupted into debate over this card, whether to label it a 4.9 or 5.0. To put the question another way, should you play this card, or should you play this card *to the max*? Fruitful debate, ye warlocks and warriors. Clearly the 3.8 score from the readers is flimsy, a score perhaps the result of a clicking snafu. That's okay. What's more interesting is why **Disintegrate** scores as high as it does, and why it's not a 5.0

X spells are flexible, almost by definition. This particular X spell promotes extra flexibility by playing the role of creature removal or player removal. In essence it always has something to do. In addition it has merit both early and late, a rare and valuable trait in a card. Especially in limited, lands becomes extraneous after a certain point. **Disintegrate** makes use of every scrap of extra mana you can muster, and progressive turns make **Disintegrate** even better. In addition to all those merits, it's one of the cards that can either lock up a win, get you out of losing, or give you an absurd come-from-behind victory. It's kind of like **Phthisis**, except for being castable at anytime, in (almost) any deck. All that flexibility and strength makes **Disintegrate** absurdly powerful, and every time I open one I hear music.



However it's not a 5.0, and it doesn't go into *every* deck. Almost every deck certainly, every red deck definitely, but not quite automatically into every possible color combination. To explain why, let's go back a few years to Rath block. **Tempest**, the first set of the block, had a little common called **Rolling Thunder**:



Rolling Thunder remains one of the best commons in the game, a title shared by **Pestilence** and for similar reasons. Roll was incredible beyond belief, but it was a touch mana-inefficient. **Rolling Thunder** wasn't a card you wanted in your opening hand, but rather drawn off the top after you had played out the rest of your lands and creatures. In that way you'd maximize the effect without actually drawing the clunkiness too early.

As for *Time Spiral*, if **Disintegrate** is your splash card that means you're playing slightly worse mana to make it work. If you draw the big D before you found your splash land, than it's a dead card. There are some draft decks that cannot give up their mana base or endure the potential for a dead draw. I made mention of a triple **Tendrils of Corruption**/triple **Fathom Seer** deck for the former, and there are some highly aggressive white decks for the latter. It's rare but it happens, and in that rare case, **Disintegrate** must be passed. If you automatically take the X spell you're doing yourself a disservice, even though 99 times out of 100 you'd be correct. For that possibility, **Disintegrate** does not score a 5.0. It remains absurd.

Ashcoat Bear

Mike's score: 1.8
Readers' score: 1.9
My score: 1.8

Turian: "A fine man. Nothing special but it along with the **2/2 Sliver** are important for the green mana curve."

Looks like everyone is in agreement here. Roughly half of your green decks can sport Flashcoat Bear, sometimes providing a nice trick or fill a mana spot, sometimes just being average. I thought this card was pretty cool when the set first came out, then became disinterested. Now I'm back to being kind of fond of him, although he still easily hits the board.



Sporesower Thallid

Mike's score: 2.5
Readers' score: 2.6
My score: 2.6

Turian: "Even better if you are playing Thallids, a 4/4 for 4 mana is a great deal. The **once again** hurts its pointing slightly, but for a ground creature this is a very good rating."

Again everyone seems to agree. He's got excellent stats, and his ability goes from decent to amazing depending on the green deck in question. Like **Riftwing Cloudskate**, these get pretty scary in multiples.



Unyaro Bees

Mike's score: 1.2
Readers' score: 1.8
My score: 1.3

Turian: "Considering that being a creature gets you to about 0.7-0.8 for almost free with the way 1 point, a 1.2 isn't a great rating. A **improved Vampire Bats** which is best in mono-green. The Bees probably don't even deserve this high a rating."

They look good on paper and the design is cool, but the end execution just does not pan out. I actually had the same thought as Mike, that the Bees do not deserve this high of a rating. The readers' score of 1.8 reveals some optimism, or that your Limited games are really slow.

The Bees have two abilities that cost mana. Good ones, but completely at odds with each other. Do you pump for full damage, or keep one forest back "just in case"? Either way you shortchange the other one. Either way, to maximize the effect you need lots of green mana; the color best known for diversifying. All this so you can minimize the amount of other green cards you get to play in a turn. In a heavy, heavy green deck (these do exist, roughly in the same proportion as you passing **Disintegrate**) **Unyaro Bees** can have a place. In normal decks with normal mana needs, in a tempo-driven format like *Time Spiral*, the Bees just don't play a strong role.



Locket of Yesterdays

Mike's score: 0.0
Readers' score: 0.6
My score: -2

Turian: "A card which has constructed uses but doesn't offer what Limited decks are looking for."

The 0.6 from the readers is there because you can't underbid the card to balance out the mis-ratings. That's ok, I can. I genuinely tried to conceive of a use for this card in Limited. I did have a scenario, but it involved the fifth **Disintegrate**. At that point the Locket seemed unnecessary. A land will be better.

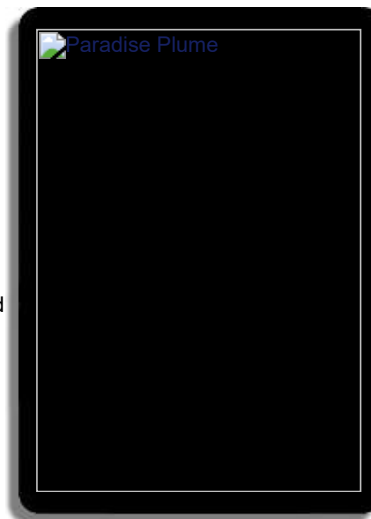


Paradise Plume

Mike's score: 1.1
Readers' score: 2.7
My score: 0.9

Turian: "This card is best when playing against an opponent with the same colors as you, but Paradise Plume is one of the weaker mana fixers in the format. Often I would just choose to play another land over this card."

Look at those score differences! This was another card where I really liked the design and wanted to enjoy, but it just doesn't hold up. Giving up your fourth turn is gigantic, and the life gain just won't give you enough time back. You can make it the last card you play, except than you're cutting into the +life, and you really don't need acceleration anyway. Unlike the Locket, there are genuine scenarios where this comes in from the side, or once in a very great while, can be played main. A rating of 2.7 implies putting it into a deck 95% of the time, which is completely absurd. If you need the acceleration that badly, you're drafting too many high-mana spells. You want your cards to actually do something substantial, especially at four mana. If you do want mana fixing, at least try to use the version that's cheaper than your creatures.



Lotus Bloom:

Mike's score: 0.5
Readers' score: 2.7
My score: 1.2

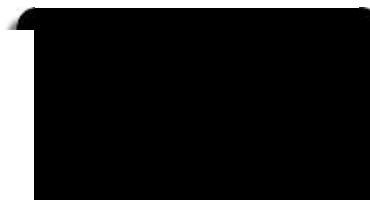
Turian: "I can see playing this if I think I really need to get lucky in a bad matchup. Or if I have a totally awesome bomb (like Akroma/Avatar of Woe), but often I would prefer a land."

The last major score divide, and it seems to be a whopper. I don't know where that 2.7 comes from. Is it a remnant from Lotus Bloom's excellence in Standard right now? In Limited the card is okay but very niche. It's card disadvantage which means you need a reason to recoup the loss. Multiple **Careful Consideration** is one option, or the big creature route like Mike was saying. As he says, it can provide some lucky wins but a land is far more consistent. Aside from value drafting, most decks can quite easily pass this by.



Calciform Pools

Mike's score: 1.3
Readers' score: 2.0
My score: 2.0



Turian: "Great if you have a card like Spell Burst to power up, or if you feel like you really need the mana fixing, once again I would prefer a basic land."

Here is where we diverge with Mike a bit, although it's a tricky issue. I like these lands, but there are multiple factors at work. How badly do you need a specific land type (*Tendrils of Corruption*)? How badly do you need one colored mana on turn one (*Ivory Giant*)? Do you have a place to put lots of mana (*Conflagrate*, multiple *Momentary Blink*)? These are not simple questions. As I said, I like two spells in one turn, so these usually make the cut as an option to provide that, although often as the 18th land. They do make good *Coal Stoker* sinks, but they're definitively not an automatic decision either way.

And So...

That's all for Limited Information in 2006. If you liked this format, or agreed or disagreed with any of the scores here, sound off in the forums. Lots of credit goes to Mr. Turian for helping out this week, as well as everyone who took the time to vote. Have a fun and safe holiday season, and we'll see you back here in January. Thanks for reading.



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