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# Jaya Ballard, Task Mage

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 Taste the Magic  
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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

*Magicthegathering.com* doesn't normally run preview articles in these holiday "Best of" weeks. The thought is that the zing of a preview article is usually in that it's busting out something new. My *Jaya Ballard, Task Mage* article is no longer "new", but in my mind, this article is not about the card. It's about the history of the character, and its zing is not in the preview, but in the slow burlesque-style revelation of the card. I poked and prodded Scott Johns a little and (since you're reading this) clearly he agreed. Preview, shmreview. Let's have a look at her again.

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For starters, I want to express what a privilege it is to bring you the first glimpse of **Magic's** favorite Fire Woman, *Jaya Ballard, Task Mage*. I consider myself lucky, because not only is *Jaya* a character that has captured the imaginations of **Magic** fans for years, but because this card features artwork by yours truly. Not only do I get to show off her talents, but also my own. What a firecracker this is going to be!

I am sure a good number of you are wondering who she is and why I am making such a fuss. Let's start at the beginning. *Jaya Ballard* is a *Task Mage*. This is the term for a maverick wizard who works as a hired gun. There are cryptomancer task mages and auramancer task mages and healers and diviners and counter-magicians. There are Swiss Army Knife task mages who can do a little bit of everything. *Jaya Ballard* does one thing – burn stuff!

Burning stuff is what leads us to the answer to the second part of the question—why such a fuss? The fuss is because *Jaya* has been sizzling our hearts with her fiery wit since way back in *Ice Age*. Here's a sampling of some of her early quotes:



Incinerate

"Yes, I think 'toast' is an appropriate description."  
 —*Jaya Ballard, Task Mage*



Lava Burst

"Overkill? This isn't a game of *Kick-the-Ouphe!*"  
 —*Jaya Ballard, Task Mage*

"Just the thing for those pesky water mages."  
 —*Jaya Ballard, Task Mage*

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Pyroblast



Meteor Shower

*"Eenie, meenie, minie, moe . . . oh, why not all of them?"  
—Jaya Ballard, Task Mage*



Word of Blasting

*"Walls? What walls?"  
—Jaya Ballard, Task Mage*



Pyroclasm

*"Leaves more room for the big ones to fight in, you know."  
—Jaya Ballard, Task Mage*

I think you can see that this is not a woman to be trifled with. Not only does she have the 'tude, but she has the firepower to back it up. Look at all those spells—red as they come, and hot to the core. She has a lot more where that came from too, flavor text on a total of 20 cards.

It just occurred to me that I have not yet shown you the preview card. I know you're champing at the bit to see it, but don't skip ahead. Trust me, you'll appreciate it more if you wait 'til we get there.

Flavor text is not all this flamethrower has going for her. Jaya burns up the pages of two *Ice Age* block novels; *The Eternal Ice* and *The Shattered Alliance*, both by Jeff Grubb. I don't want to spoil the fun for any of you who still plan on reading these novels, so I will not get into specifics. Unfortunately, there's some fat info that I need to

reveal in order to do Jaya's character justice - hopefully, this won't keep you from reading the novels. Anyway, here's the short and sweet:

Jaya bops around Terisiare lending a flame to those who will pay. She and fellow adventurer Jodah get tangled up in conflicts between Kjeldor, Balduvia, and Tresserhorn, and walk away with an ominous trophy—the magical rings of the necromancer Lim-Dul—still adorning his severed hand! But one of the rings took hold of her mind and bent her to the will of an ancient mage of great power, Mairsil. In order to save Jaya from Mairsil, (Wow, I am really boiling this down. Read the novels—there is so much flesh attached to these bare bones), Jodah shatters his magic mirror on Mairsil/Jaya's face. Sounds like a strange way to save your pal, eh? Read on. Jodah's mirror was enchanted by Freyalise, the powerful Planeswalker who ended the Ice Age. When it hit Jaya, it did not kill her, it “released her spark.”

I am fighting the urge to head up this paragraph with “You Can't Start a Fire Without a Spark,” but this is as far as I'd allow myself to sink into hot melted cheese. Anyway, the “Spark...” This is the term that represents a person's potential for becoming a Planeswalker. I hit on what a Planeswalker is in last week's “[Parlez Vous Vorthos](#),” but here's another quick hit: A Planeswalker is a nearly omnipotent being who can travel from one planar dimension to another, collecting knowledge, power, and magic from all of these worlds.

So back to Jaya Ballard—when the magic mirror breaks and releases its power, Jaya's dormant spark ignites and she becomes a Planeswalker. From fireflinging baddie to world-scorching pyropotentiary in the blink of an eye. Jaya being a Planeswalker is why we get to see her incendiary repartee on cards outside of Terisiare (*Ice Age* block) and outside of the plane of Dominaria. Here are a few examples of Jaya quotes found in Nth Edition sets (which are collections of cards from all **Magic** planes.)



Inferno

*“Some have said there is no subtlety to destruction. You know what? They're dead.”*  
—Jaya Ballard, task mage



Chicken Egg

*“That's a lotta nuggets.”*  
—Jaya Ballard, task mage

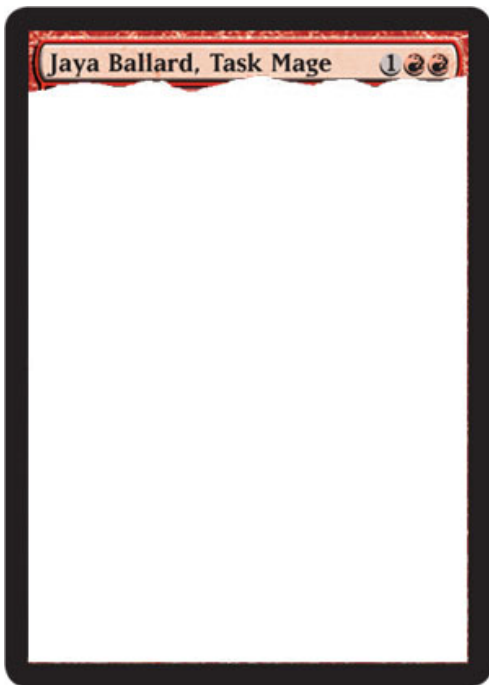


Sizzle

*“Of course you should fight fire with fire. You should fight everything with fire.”*  
—Jaya Ballard, task mage

That last one really sums up Jaya's modus operandi pretty well.

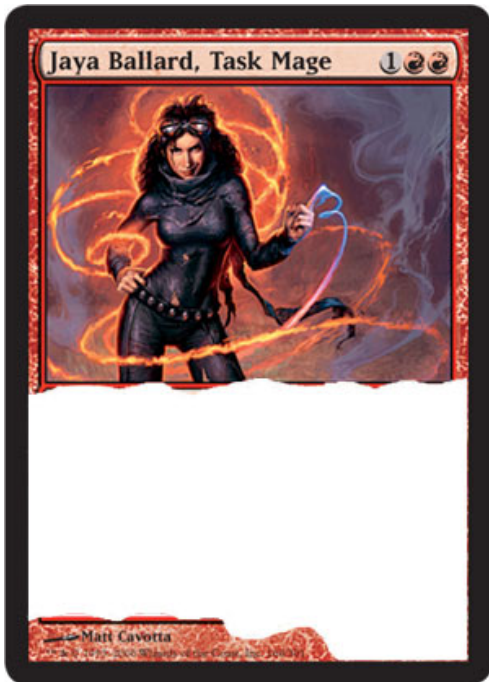
At this point, many of you may be wondering what this history lesson has to do with a card preview. Allow me



a moment to explain how it means everything to this card preview and to this entire new set of cards. *Time Spiral* is a set of new cards whose eyes are all on **Magic's** history. You won't need to be a history expert to master play with *Time Spiral* cards, or even to be a true fan of their flavor. But a little knowledge about the past will unlock layer after layer of extra special goodness in just about every *Time Spiral* card out there. Jaya Ballard, Task Mage is a great example of this. This is why I am going to reveal her to you one layer at a time.

Here's layer 1. No real news here except we get to see that she is (no big surprise) a Red card and that she costs 1. I, for one, am happy to see the double in her casting cost. If this sizzler doesn't demand a commitment to Red, then I am a stone-faced Spike.

Click [here](#) to see layer 2.



Ah yes, the all-important layer 2. My favorite layer.

All that babbling I just blew out should give you a bit more appreciation for this illustration. It should tell you that the brassy pose and sassy smirk are probably the look you'll see last before she burns your retinas out. It was a foregone conclusion that there would be fire in the illustration, but I did not want it to be big, fat, clunky fire. The thin, almost calligraphic line of flame that she has effortlessly spun shows off her virtuosity and pyromancer's knack. The tight clothing...well, that's just her style. The fact that they're tattered and she sports goggles speaks to the conditions of *Time Spiral's* post-apocalyptic conditions. It's harsh out there, with roiling time rifts, blasting salt storms, and desiccated terrain all around. But is that enough to wipe the smile off Jaya's face. No way—she's happy to use salt in her cooking!

Click [here](#) to see layer 3

Layer 3 is more revealing than it may at first appear. What is no big surprise is the fact that Jaya is a legend and that she is human. Both of those things could have been deduced from information already revealed. The news is Spellshaper and Creature.

Easy part first - As I said earlier, *Time Spiral* has an eye on **Magic** history, and the sub-type Spellshaper is a part of that history. The depth of that history is further plumbed in layers 4 and below...

"Creature" is news? Of course she's a creature card. How is this news? Well, as it was laid out earlier, Jaya Ballard is a Planeswalker. Check out this excerpt from last week's article, "Parlez Vous Vorthos":

Planeswalkers are all-powerful beings, too omnipotent to be represented on cards as mere creatures. This is why we've



never seen any Teferi, Freyalise, or Leshrac cards. It's just too much of a stretch.

That it is—so what gives here? To explain, we'll have to pan out a bit and look at what's going on in *Time Spiral*. In a nutshell, the multiverse is cracked and riddled with time rifts—rips in the fabric of time and space. The time rifts give mages access to creatures and spells from other times and places! This Jaya Ballard, the one pulled through a time rift into *Time Spiral*, is a younger Jaya who has not yet ignited her Planeswalker spark. This is why she gets to light up a **Magic** card.

Layer 4 requires a little set-up. Take a look back at some of Jaya's famous quotes. For starters, let's go with this one:

*"Just the thing for those pesky water mages."*

Combine that quote with the fact that Jaya is a spellshaper and you can get an idea of what layer 4 has to offer. Click [here](#) to reveal layer 4.



Jaya Ballard is a Pyroblasting machine! No, nitpickers, she does not counter blue spells. Remember, "you fight everything with fire." Countering spells is for people who don't have the stomach to look at smoldering remains.

If you ask me, combining the old Spellshaper sub-type with a kick fish-ass old spell is a nifty way to make a new card. Hmm... Jaya has been quoted a lot. I wonder if she has any more related tricks up her sleeve?

Click [here](#) to see layer 5

Stop your chuckling, White Weenie, she can roast you on a stick too! Take a look back, Jaya has something to say about *Incinerate* as well.

*"Yes, I think 'toast' is an appropriate description."*

The cook is in the kitchen, and you've got to have a pretty fat rump to stay off the menu at this rump roast. Only the fatties with toughness 4 or greater get to rest easy when Chef Ballard is in town.



Let's see what her flavor text has to say about all this cookin':

Click [here](#) to see layer 6



Flavor text - bah! We're torching everyone half a sandwich short of **Borborygmos**. (Ha! The gastronomic references just keep on rumbling.) Nearly nobody is safe from the **Inferno**:

*"Some have said there is no subtlety to destruction. You know what? They're dead."*

Is there any task this Task Mage can't do? There might be a couple, but the ones she does do are more fun.

I find it a little ironic that the character whose infamy was stoked through flavor text ends up with none. But, in the interest of properly portraying her character, I think 3 different levels of flat-out burning do her great justice. After all, she has already been quoted on 20 cards, but this card is her one chance to shine—or should I say, burn!

*Matt Cavotta has always been a fantasy goober. At various points in his gooberhood, he has used his nerdy knowledge to become a professional goober. He went from scribbling pictures of his own **D&D** characters to illustrating books and cards for his two favorite games; **D&D** and **Magic**. Then he channeled his inner 7th level Illusionist/3rd level Bard and landed himself a job at Wizards as a writer. He continues to cast his illusion spells each morning, lest they find out he's just another goober.*



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