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Zealous Pursuits

Noah Weil
 Limited Information
 Tuesday, January 9, 2007



W oahhhhh! *Planar Chaos* is crazy! [Black Wraths!](#) [Green Balls Lightning!](#) [Some kinda flaming dudes with pickaxes!](#)

Looks like things will be getting hectic. Remember when seeing white Akroma was a big deal? Now we have [Burning Cinder Fury Crimson Chaos Akroma \(with morph!\)](#) That pre-release is going to be wild. Too bad it's *two whole weeks* away.

In the meantime, triple *Time Spiral* drafting remains relevant, and dare I say fun? I'll confess that *Time Spiral* Limited has become one of my favorite formats of all time. Eventually it will shift into TTP, but for now I remain enthralled with the status quo. There are a lot of reasons I'm so fond of this drafting environs. I suppose it boils down to the fact that months and months into it, people are still learning and revising their strategies. The games can be awfully close, where a single misstep can completely turn things around. To me, flexible draft tactics and tense games make for a great format.

Why all this *Time Spiral* love? In the process of drafting and playing the next two weeks' deck, those factors came into play. The draft itself went in a rare direction, a direction I felt necessary based on a combination of signals and on-the-fly strategy alterations. Of all the drafts covered for this column, this one had the highest quantity of decisions I'd label as "strenuous." As always, feel free to share points of departure in the forums.

Pack 1

Pack 1, Pick 1

Slipstream Serpent, Nantuko Shaman, Castle Raptors, Gorgon Recluse, Spiketail Drakeling, Scarwood Treefolk, Eternity Snare, Molder, Venser's Sliver, Children of Korlis, Chronatog Totem, Spirit Loop, Weatherseed Totem, Magus of the Mirror, Safe Haven

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It's nice when you get an obvious first pick to kick off the draft. Unfortunately, this isn't it. This pack is a textbook case of providing possibilities based on color preference rather than absolute power. Admittedly, there are cards here that are more powerful than others. But if you were dead set on a particular color combination over anything else, you could argue a number of choices. [Nantuko Shaman](#), [Slipstream Serpent](#), [Castle Raptors](#), [Gorgon Recluse](#); some of these picks are worse on a technical level, but the option is legitimate. If you wanted to force an archetype, you have the option.



Me, I'm not so forceful with my decks. As far as strength and consistency are concerned, the best card in this pack is [Castle Raptors](#). It's also a solid signal, as there are no other white cards of note in this booster. Should white be cut from my right, [Castle Raptors](#) can still splash, and does a credible job at that. It's not an ideal use of the card, but it's certainly more possible than a splashed [Drakeling](#) or [Nantuko Shaman](#). Any pick where you can get a flexible casting cost, with a good signal and reasonable power, is a solid opening to a draft. I have no personal aversions to white, so [Castle Raptors](#) it is.

My pick: [Castle Raptors](#)

Pack 1, Pick 2

[Viscerid Deepwalker](#), [Ironclaw Buzzardiers](#), [Search for Tomorrow](#), [Icatian Crier](#), [Dark Withering](#), [Goblin Skycutter](#), [Cyclopean Giant](#), [Screeching Sliver](#), [Psychotic Episode](#), [Jedit's Dragoons](#), [Fledgling Mawcor](#), [Aspect of Mongoose](#), [Walk the Aeons](#), [Darkness](#)

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Here's another booster where personal preference has influence over the "correct" pick. In this case, assuming I want to stick with the [Castle Raptors](#), do I want it to pair it alongside blue, black, or green? Of these options, black is the least favorable. [Dark Withering](#) is a reasonable card, but I believe B/W to be the worst combination in *Time Spiral* Limited. Why? Well, black and white are both colors that appreciate being very self-contained (e.g. [Celestial Crusader](#), [Tendrils of Corruption](#)). You oftentimes get mana that's a complete mess, a particular problem when the archetype in question is depressingly slow. When you have a combination that has tricky mana and is

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so glacial it can't afford to mana-stumble, you have a recipe for trouble. Now, I do know of people who have drafted B/W successfully. *Time Spiral* is deep enough that any combination has potential. But I've seen a lot of B/W decks end in disaster, and a number of those I've picked up myself. Considering the pack density of *Time Spiral*, a truly bad deck is a rare occurrence, yet B/W seems to pull it off with frequency – a combination I'll make efforts to avoid.

Search for Tomorrow is an interesting pick in that it opens up everything else. It makes **Castle Raptors** an almost automatic inclusion, yet still gives another color to work with, as G/X/w. It's justifiable here, but I greatly prefer the blue.

Blue-white is a great combination. Between internal synergies, a generally good curve, and easy **Momentary Blink** tricks, U/W is a very strong archetype. Within that color scheme, both **Fledgling Mawcor** and **Walk the Aeons** are powerful. The littlest Mawcor offers an evasive threat and pie-breaking removal in a combination woefully short. **Walk the Aeons** is a strong card in tempo-driven TS Limited and goes up significantly especially for U/W. In that combination Walk is at the top side of the mana curve, and it works excellently alongside the early damage and evasive threats U/W provides. Frankly, I don't think the card is getting the respect it deserves. For all that, I like **Fledgling Mawcor** here. Some people have called it blue's best uncommon, which should give you an idea of its power. In addition, it plays well both in U/W and in any other combination. It's flexible, it can be splashed, and it gets obscene in multiples; all qualities **Walk the Aeons** lacks. I'm extremely happy to add it to any of my blue decks, and it's the pick here.

My pick: **Fledgling Mawcor**

Pack 1, Pick 3

Errant Doomsayers, Corpulent Corpse, Viscerid Deepwalker, Ironclaw Buzzardiers, Icatian Crier, Jhoira's Timebug, Jedit's Dragoons, Savage Thallid, Ancient Grudge, Return to Dust, Sarpadian Empires, Vol. VII, Conspiracy, Zealot il-Vec

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In *Time Spiral*, signaling is an interesting animal. On the one hand, strongly cutting a color can mean very late bombs in pack two, and sometimes even pack three. I remember a sixth-pick **Magus of the Disk**, **Verdeloth the Ancient** ninth, etc. Receiving a higher percentage of "first" picks is the most famous attribute to good signaling. The other result of effective signals is simply getting enough cards to finish your deck. Getting bombs over bombs is nice, but barring that, getting the 22-24 nonland cards is a priority. Not reading color signals and/or sending bad ones could very well force a player to play with their 12th-15th picks; the dregs, the "skill testers." However, that particular fear doesn't carry much weight in *Time Spiral*. As Aaron Forsythe has [reminded us](#) (twice), *Time Spiral* has a very high quantity of playable cards in a given booster. As such, even if you're getting cut and missing the primo picks, your deck shouldn't be an utter failure, which is to say you'll have enough cards to give your opponent a run for his or her money. Consequently, signaling isn't the end-all be-all of draft in this set, as your errors or random color-rich packs being sent along aren't fatal. So while I personally *consider* signaling in my picks, it rarely makes me take a far worse card just to send good notation down the line. By the same token, if there's reason enough I'll jump into a color I know is getting plumbed. It's a gamble, but since I'm not worried about quantity with *Time Spiral*, why not grab quality too?

Incidentally, signaling matters far more when you're drafting a specific deck with very specific needs as opposed to just a two-color deck. A classic example is the Sliver deck, which has a far shallower card pool than your standard Limited draft. Getting cut while drafting Slivers is pretty miserable, because there are fewer viable replacements for that deck than for a normal one. In a regular green draft, for example, even if the player on your right is taking all the **Penumbra Spiders**, you can still make do with **Scarwood Treefolk**. The same just isn't true for Slivers. Either you're getting them or you're not. If I see a pack with **Might, Sedge, Fury, Bonesplitter**, and **Gemhide Slivers**, I'd pass the whole thing along rather than be the second or third Sliver player. The short rule is that the more cards there are for your deck (and with *Time Spiral's* depth, there's a lot), the less signaling matters.

Why is all this signaling talk relevant? Since its value in *Time Spiral* is lessened somewhat, I can afford to take chances with signals. Looking at this pack it appears blue is in a bad way. Blue, you may remember, is a color I'm interested in drafting. If blue were shallow in TS, I could read the signal in this pack and abandon it, taking an average card in another color. Yet blue is far from shallow in TS, and in fact is the overall strongest Limited color. The color is strong enough, and the packs have enough depth, that I can piggyback my neighbor drafting blue, take the Deepwalker here, and reap the rewards in pack two.

This is sometimes called the double cut, and it's a very effective tool. Reinforcing someone else's choices to take advantage in the next booster can be brutal. This was a popular technique in *Odyssey* Block, where the guy on your right taking all the black meant you could usurp the color in *Torment*. In *Ravnica*, you'd have people drafting red and blue cards so they could get Izzet from *Guildpact*, the strongest guild in that set. If the person on their left was aware, they could draft their own deck (usually something with green) along with a double cut of red and blue. In *Guildpact*, the double cutter received the best Izzet goods while the originally signaler received something...filtered. When it works, it's a gold mine. Convuluted? That's the fun of draft!

Getting back to this booster, hopefully I can double cut the blue and take advantage in pack two, while having the white to fall back on as my open color. Getting one pack's worth of blue is better than none, especially with the other options presented here. If it goes *really* well, sometimes the original player will be forced out of the color,

giving you pack three also! The final push for the Deepwalker is that it's a strong card, stronger than I first gave it credit for. Who can be blamed for thinking a five-mana 2/3 wasn't any sort of quality? And what's with the waterbreathing? Watch out, it's moisturizing! The stats are average, but Deepwalker itself is solid because it finds itself precisely in the right spot in the right color. Blue cards are stronger than anything else. Thus one way blue can lose is the tempo game, where the blue player simply doesn't have the time to play out everything. **Viscerid Deepwalker** solves this problem nicely, by being an excellent turn-one play. Afterwards, blue can go with their Looters and **Snapback** and **Ephemeron**s and **Fathom Seer** and what have you. From that very first turn, Deepwalker will eventually let you keep the pressure on or have a nice blocker. Late, it's the only blue common at five, again playing a crucial role in your mana curve. It just fits the color well. If the Deepwalker were green, it would be far worse. Green has a glut of one drops and some better fives. Besides, forestbreathing? That's really weird. Thankfully, after **Ebony Treefolk** that particular ability was trunkated.



Quite a bit of analysis for a five-mana 2/3! To recap, I like blue, **Viscerid Deepwalker** plays useful roles in a blue deck, and it snaps off the color sharply. Since there's no better option in our colors so far, I'm happy to take it.

My pick: **Viscerid Deepwalker**

Pack 1, Pick 4

Flamecore Elemental, Mana Skimmer, Coral Trickster, Feebleness, Molder, Children of Korlis, Viscid Lemures, Ground Rift, Dread Return, Fool's Demise, Urza's Factory, Slipstream Serpent

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This is a pretty weak pack for all colors, but especially white. Blue actually gets the most representation, with two decent morphs. In this instance, I prefer Slipstream over the **Coral Trickster**. I like **Coral Trickster**, and it already combos with (at least) **Fledgling Mawcor**. Yet the Slipstream pick comes with a big benefit: it's good against blue. That's the color we're playing, by the way. The extension to this vulnerability is that **Slipstream Serpent** is good against the other blue decks, which are often (but not always) strong. Therefore, drafting Slippy lets me take a good card away from the best decks, *and* gives me a tool to use against them. It's less good against other builds, but I hope the natural strength of U/W shores that up. Any pick that's fine on its own and has extra value against strong opposition deserves serious consideration, and it's my choice here.

My pick: **Slipstream Serpent**

Pack 1, Pick 5

Scarwood Treefolk, Orcish Cannonade, Amrou Scout, Mana Skimmer, Two-Headed Sliver, Prismatic Lens, Clockspinning, Sidewinder Sliver, Viscid Lemures, Plated Pegasus, Haunting Hymn

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Here's where all the blue being drafted behind us catches up. Luckily there are still some on-color options, specifically **Amrou Scout** and **Prismatic Lens**. I personally like the Lens a lot, as it provides good options as well as a functional accelerant. Also you'll get some decks notably absent of two-mana cards. Blue-white, historically, is not one of them. A Lens here is reasonable, but it doesn't offer the raw potential of **Amrou Scout**. Even if Lens were the better pick, we wouldn't want to push anyone into white now. Staying on-color, with good signaling and probably the best card, makes this easy.

My pick: **Amrou Scout**

Pack 1, Pick 6

Cancel, Pentarch Ward, Pit Keeper, Divine Congregation, Jhoira's Timebug, Chameleon Blur, Subterranean Shambler, Vampiric Sliver, Chronatog Totem, Hivestone

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Yuck, nothing in blue or white jumps out here. **Pentarch Ward, Cancel, and Chronatog Totem** are playable, but strictly unexciting. Instead, that **Hivestone** offers strong utility against an opposing sliver deck. **Pentarch Ward** is far more likely to be played main than **Hivestone** but at the same time is far less likely to outright win games than the **Hivestone** is. There will be plenty of time to pick up filler if/when this deck needs it. That depth gives us some cushioning in sacrificing possible maindeck picks for strong but narrow sideboard ones. Since the danger of the pick outright backfiring is small, why not grab the opportunity while it's on the (digital) table?

My pick: **Hivestone**

Pack 1, Pick 7

Pentarch Ward, Zealot il-Vec, Savage Thallid, Screeching Sliver, Ancient Grudge, Dreadship Reef, Ghostflame Sliver, Angel's Grace, Sidewinder Sliver

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A single **Zealot il-Vec** is underwhelming, but at least it's a Rebel to be searched out by the Scout. Getting multiples has some intriguing possibilities, more so than **Angel's Grace** or **Sidewinder Sliver**. I wouldn't be enamored with a single Zealot, but if a goal is to collect multiples, one has to start somewhere. In a pinch, it does play nicely alongside **Fledgling Mawcor**. Again, the potential of the pick is more important than just its strength in the abstract. I continue to find that *Time Spiral* rewards picks like this, since punishment for unmet potential isn't very strict. You'll get your 22-24 cards, so take some risk!

My pick: **Zealot il-Vec**

Pack 1, Pick 8

Gaze of Justice, **Shadow Sliver**, **Bogardan Rager**, **D'Avenant Healer**, **Dementia Sliver**, **Dread Return**, **Sindbad**, **Zealot il-Vec**

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Go scheme. One Zealot is weak, but two approaches interesting. I certainly like two Zealots over one Zealot and one Healer. At this time, **Gaze of Justice** is way too optimistic.

My pick: **Zealot il-Vec**

Pack 1, Pick 9

Eternity Snare, **Molder**, **Venser's Sliver**, **Children of Korlis**, **Chronatog Totem**, **Spirit Loop**, **Safe Haven**

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After grabbing two more 3cc cards, cards that wanted to be played as early as possible, the interest in totems has waned. **Venser's Sliver** is decent as an emergency **Corpulent Corpse** blocker, or as another tool against opposing sliver decks, or simply as a player with average stats. Both artifacts are completely unremarkable, but I'd feel just a little better maindecking Venser's than the totem.

My pick: **Venser's Sliver**

Pack 1, Pick 10

Cyclopean Giant, **Screeching Sliver**, **Psychotic Episode**, **Jedit's Dragoons**, **Aspect of Mongoose**, **Darkness**

An underrated card, **Jedit's Dragoons** play particularly well with W/U's mana curve and **Momentary Blink**.

My pick: **Jedit's Dragoons**

Pack 1, Pick 11

Jhoira's Timebug, **Jedit's Dragoons**, **Ancient Grudge**, **Return to Dust**, **Conspiracy**

An opportunity to take another useful sideboard card. Once in a while, one plays against a deck heavily reliant on artifacts and/or enchantments. It's lovely being able to exploit that focus.

My pick: **Return to Dust**

Pack 1, Pick 12

Molder, **Ground Rift**, **Fool's Demise**, **Urza's Factory**

Both the card I'm most likely to play and the card I want least played against me, this one's easy.

My pick: **Urza's Factory**

Pack 1, Pick 13

Two-Headed Sliver, **Clockspinning**, **Sidewinder Sliver**

Probably should have taken **Clockspinning** here, a card more likely to be played than **Sidewinder Sliver**. Was I thinking of **Hivestone** combos?

My pick: **Sidewinder Sliver**

Pack 1, Pick 14

Jhoira's Timebug, **Chronatog Totem**

A random and welcome gift, although one unlikely to be put to use.

My pick: **Chronatog Totem**

Pack 1, Pick 15

Sidewinder Sliver

Oh, *that's* why I took the Sidewinder before.

My pick: Sidewinder Sliver

Deck Analysis

Things are looking good so far. We've defined our colors well. The cards represent different points on the mana curve, and are internally synergistic. At the moment, the deck looks like a mid-range deck. It can either play the control route with **Castle Raptors** and **Slipstream Serpent**, or combo with Zealot and Mawcor pinging. Not bad at all, although getting some actual spells couldn't hurt.

Pack 2

Pack 2, Pick 1

Flamecore Elemental, Gemhide Sliver, Feebleness, Castle Raptors, Chromatic Star, Tolarian Sentinel, Glass Asp, Prismatic Lens, Ground Rift, Eternity Snare, Spirit Loop, Truth or Tale, Premature Burial, Bogardan Hellkite, Wildfire Emissary

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Which is more dangerous against this deck, **Bogardan Hellkite** or **Wildfire Emissary**? It's just an idle question, since the pick here is definitely **Castle Raptors**. While neither card is a welcome sight across the table, they're not so insane as to pass on **Castle Raptors**. Raptors remain excellent; good racing against these red cards, and good against everyone else. Besides, we wouldn't want to see **Castle Raptors** across the table either!



My pick: Castle Raptors

Pack 2, Pick 2

Ironclaw Buzzardiers, Temporal Eddy, Tendrils of Corruption, Lightning Axe, Mogg War Marshal, Foriysian Interceptor, Basal Sliver, Drifter il-Dal, Subterranean Shambler, Vampiric Sliver, Thick-Skinned Goblin, Yavimaya Dryad, Greater Gargadon, Vhati il-Dal

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Feh. Not the second pick one wants to see with a dedicated U/W deck. Stay the course with **Temporal Eddy**, or hate draft/splash for **Lightning Axe**? This was, to me, really close. There's no question that **Lightning Axe** is the stronger card. **Temporal Eddy** is alright, but it frequently ends up as sideboard fodder. Does this deck need **Lightning Axe** to survive? Will including it in the deck be crippling? Again, it's a tough call. My thinking at the time was that with a lack of pure removal, and the pingers taking out the little guys, **Axe** fills a hole. Looking back, this is true but somewhat flawed. The deck has zero spells that target opposing creatures right now, so anything that does affect them goes up in value. If my **Temporal Eddys** hit the bench it's because I'm loaded to the brim with **Temporal Isolations**, **Snapback**, **Wipe Away**, etc. Without any of those cards, **Temporal Eddy** is crude but totally functional. In addition, taking the blue card means I don't have to alter picks later on to pick up a **Terramorphic Expanse** or **Chromatic Star** earlier than I'd like. It's surprisingly close, and while I went with the **Axe** this time, I'm not convinced it was the right call.

My pick: Lightning Axe

Pack 2, Pick 3

Orcish Cannonade, Keldon Halberdier, Durkwood Baloth, Sangrophage, Viashino Bladescout, Mystical Teachings, Thrill of the Hunt, Shadow Sliver, Evil Eye of Urborg, Barbed Shocker, Cavalry Master, Stonewood Invocation, Smallpox

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The Invocation has a little appeal as a finisher with shadow and flying. Unfortunately, taking it here not only requires being forced into those mana fixing picks discussed above, it also invalidates the **Lightning Axe** grab entirely. That's assuming **Stonewood Invocation** is even better than **Lightning Axe**, which is a tough argument. Luckily this time there's a reasonable on-color card in **Cavalry Master**. It's no **Nagao**, but **Cavalry Master** is still a fine beater. Avoiding that mana juggling act is no small benefit as well

My pick: Cavalry Master

Pack 2, Pick 4

Looter il-Kor, Keldon Halberdier, Ivory Giant, Grapeshot, Wormwood Dryad, Venser's Sliver, Clockspinning, Pendelhaven Elder, Quilled Sliver, Basalt Gargoyles, Ancestral Vision, Bogardan Rager

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That's more like it. **Ivory Giant** and **Looter il-Kor** are both high picks in their respective colors. **Quilled Sliver** is the base for an effective Sliver defense, and **Ancestral Vision** just draws a bunch of cards. This went to the wire, but I went with **Ancestral** here. Trust me, this one received a lot of internal debate. **Quilled Sliver** was eliminated right away, but the remaining three all offered plenty of benefits to the W/U deck. The tiebreaker was pack 2 pick 2,

that much-deliberated **Lightning Axe**. If I'm going to splash for a card, a card with potential card disadvantage built in, drawing three seems like an effective salve. In addition, this particular W/U deck is more controlling than the norm, making quantifiable card advantage more appealing than raw tempo cards. Plus, on a personal note, I really like **Ancestral Vision** in Limited. I've had a lot of success and been happy with Ancestral every time I've drafted it. I know that's not concrete reasoning, but empirical evidence is certainly valid. If that **Lightning Axe** had been **Momentary Blink** I would have gone with **Ivory Giant** instead. If it had been **Fathom Seer** I would have gone with **Looter il-Kor**. But it was **Lightning Axe**, a card worth playing if possible. Under these circumstances, with an added boost of personal affections, **Ancestral Vision** got the nod here.

My pick: **Ancestral Vision**

Pack 2, Pick 5

Crookclaw Transmuter, **Strength in Numbers**, **Zealot il-Vec**, **Flickering Spirit**, **Call to the Netherworld**, **Drifter il-Dal**, **Havenwood Wurm**, **Basal Sliver**, **Volcanic Awakening**, **Trickbind**, **Dandan**

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A classic: Do you pick the card that's abstractly stronger, or the one that better fits your particular deck? Drafters have to answer this question all the time, and needless to say, there's no automatic solution. In this case, I had the choice between **Crookclaw Transmuter** and a third **Zealot il-Vec**. The title of the article may give a clue to my inclination, but for fun I'll go through the thought process. The core question for this booster and this deck is simple: Will this deck play its Zealots? That is to say, will the deck actually be a Zealot deck, or will the two drafted so far be stamped as sideboard material? Let's start out by saying, given the choice, one would rather draft a regular U/W deck than a gimmicked **Zealot il-Vec** deck. The reason goes back to that signal discussion above, where drafting a more dedicated deck limits the depth of your picks. In addition, I don't think Zealots are all that great. Three mana 1/1s, in an aggressive color, just aren't as threatening as I'd like. Given the choice I'd prefer to draft a U/W deck with a high quantity of first pick material, but that just doesn't seem to be happening. True, a fourth pick **Looter/Ancestral** option might indicate blue was flowing, but aside from that things have been pretty dry. Sad to say, it looks like the double cut plan didn't pan out.

Given that we're getting shut out of quality blue from both sides, we need other options to stay competitive. Your standard U/W deck is not going to do it here, so it's time to move to a new direction. Yes, that **Time Spiral** depth means the deck will end up playable. But the goal is to do as well as possible, and that means making adjustments when needed. In this case, that's going for the Zealot deck. Is **Crookclaw Transmuter** a better card than **Zealot il-Vec**? Sure, often. Doesn't matter. The question, as always, is what's best for this deck. What card gives *this deck* its best chance of winning? I'm putting my money on plan *il-Vec*.

My pick: **Zealot il-Vec**

Pack 2, Pick 6

Amrou Seekers, **Temporal Eddy**, **Mogg War Marshal**, **Drudge Reavers**, **Sage of Epityr**, **Ghitu Firebreathing**, **Momentary Blink**, **Thunder Totem**, **Saltcrusted Steppe**, **Kher Keep**

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Not a tough one here. **Momentary Blink** is excellent in U/W, where flashback potential combines nicely with **Ivory Giants**, **Slipstream Serpents**, **Riftwing Cloudskates**, etc. It's cheap and effective, and I'm always happy to add a few to the final forty. While blue may be a lost cause, our vein of white remains fertile. Half a loaf is better than none.



My pick: **Momentary Blink**

Pack 2, Pick 7

Chromatic Star, **Mwonvuli Acid-Moss**, **Two-Headed Sliver**, **Blazing Blade Askari**, **Shadow Sliver**, **Paradox Haze**, **Firewake Sliver**, **Pulmonic Sliver**, **Essence Sliver**

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Wow, and wow again. The two best white Slivers, two of the best Slivers period, in one pack. The likelihood of seeing this booster at any point is extremely dim, much less at pick seven. This was yet another pick where I took the maximum amount of time to make a decision, something **Time Spiral** provides quite often (in my view, a good thing).

This decision comes down to mana concerns more than anything else, although flight does slightly outrank spirit linkosity in the mutant powers department. What is this deck doing at five mana? **Castle Raptors**, **Castle Raptors**,

and (maybe now) **Venser's Sliver**. What is this deck doing at four mana? **Fledgling Mawcor**, **Blink flashback**, **Amrou Scout** activations, maybe **Cavalry Master**...sounds like a wash to me. In the end, I just had to imagine what card my opponent would least likely to see on the other side of the table. That led me to **Pulmonic Sliver**, although only just. Still, it's a rule in Limited that no matter what you're doing, you never like seeing a stream of 3/3 flyers coming at you. With promises to watch my five-drops from here on out, I narrowly went with Sliver Pulmonic.



My pick: **Pulmonic Sliver**

Pack 2, Pick 8

Zealot il-Vec, **Sprout**, **Foriysian Interceptor**, **Aetherflame Wall**, **Detainment Spell**, **Thallid Shell-Dweller**, **Paradise Plume**, **Valor**

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This is a Zealot deck, right? **Valor** is nice and all, but it's a *Zealot* deck. I could submit a proof of this on a graph, but those seem to end half-baked (although good for getting a rise out of the audience...).

Four is more than three; the mathletes told me so.

My pick: **Zealot il-Vec**

Pack 2, Pick 9

Feebleness, **Chromatic Star**, **Tolarian Sentinel**, **Ground Rift**, **Eternity Snare**, **Spirit Loop**, **Truth or Tale**

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Tolarian Sentinel combines nicely with a lot of cards, but short those, it's just average. I don't know if **Lightning Axe** is even going to make the final cut at this point, but I know the Star gives the option.

My pick: **Chromatic Star**

Pack 2, Pick 10

Ironclaw Buzzardiers, **Mogg War Marshal**, **Foriysian Interceptor**, **Basal Sliver**, **Drifter il-Dal**, **Thick-Skinned Goblin**

I could see a hate draft here if there were anything scary. Since there's not, the deck might as well take a card that could theoretically see play.

My pick: **Drifter il-Dal**

Pack 2, Pick 11

Sangrophage, **Mystical Teachings**, **Thrill of the Hunt**, **Shadow Sliver**, **Barbed Shocker**

Now here's the perfect opportunity for defensive drafting. No card worth playing, and the option to remove something potentially irritating. There's nothing intrinsically wrong with defensive drafting, people just seem to do it way too often. Well, not *you* of course.

My pick: **Thrill of the Hunt**

Pack 2, Pick 12

Ivory Giant, **Wormwood Dryad**, **Venser's Sliver**, **Clockspinning**

Amazing. Mana from heaven, as they say. Considering how close I took this card back at Pack 2 Pick 4, seeing it comin' round the table is a real gift. While the blue results have been mixed, white has definitely been rewarding. Someone probably should have hated this away, but I ain't complaining.

My pick: **Ivory Giant**

Pack 2, Pick 13

Call to the Netherworld, **Drifter il-Dal**, **Trickbind**

Trickbind is a decent card, providing the occasional anti-suspension, anti-**Terramorphic Expanse** utility. It's a bit too narrow to maindeck for my tastes, but I know people like them. Regardless, it's a vastly stronger pick than a second **Drifter il-Dal**.

My pick: **Trickbind**

Pack 2, Pick 14

Ghitu Firebreathing, **Saltcrusted Steppe**

Cast and re-cast Thrill with one easy tap! Operators are standing by.

My pick: Saltcrusted Steppe

Pack 2, Pick 15

Paradox Haze

My pick: Paradox Haze

Pack 3

Pack 3, Pick 1

Errant Ephemeron, Flowstone Channeler, Trespasser il-Vec, Amrou Scout, Grapeshot, Children of Korlis, Sangrophage, Viashino Bladescout, Mystical Teachings, Gustcloak Cavalier, Pendelhaven Elder, Might Sliver, Swarmyard, Pandemonium, Phantom Wurm

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This booster was another brutal set of options. The **Amrou Scout** and **Errant Ephemeron** stand out, but that **Grapeshot** is not unreasonable. With all the neat ping effects, just one or two extra points could take down a Baloth. Even though **Grapeshot** is completely reasonable, and rather deadly against this deck, I couldn't justify it against the other two.

The real puzzle was between **Errant Ephemeron** and **Amrou Scout**. Both are excellent two-drops, both of which provide a lot of offense unchecked. On the surface, **Amrou Scout** seems like the obvious choice. While no one debates the usefulness of **Errant Ephemeron** in whatever deck it finds itself, this was a **Zealot il-Vec** deck. **Amrou Scout** powers them out from the fourth turn on. If one or two Zealots are dealing damage, three or four would be even stronger.

But there's the problem. The reason I don't generally like the Zealots is their low stats. Things with one toughness have a habit of dying in *Time Spiral Limited*, from **Grapeshot** to **Subterranean Shambler** to, well, **Zealot il-Vec**. A second **Amrou Scout** didn't address this vulnerability, rather it made the weakness more acute. With four or more Zealots in the deck, finding them wouldn't be an issue. If they were surviving, they were going to do good things. If they were dying off to something, especially something recurring, another **Amrou Scout** wouldn't help. Had I no Scouts going into this pick I may have still gone that route, just for the searching option. But with my entire early game being wrapped up in X/1s, I wanted to fight on another front. **Errant Ephemeron** laughs at all the weaknesses of Team Zealot.



It's again a question of what's better for the deck. While **Amrou Scout** fits the deck like a glove, it doesn't provide any flexibility. **Errant Ephemeron** is wildly strong and is a great backup plan in case the first doesn't come to fruition. At the time I was on the fence between the two, but looking back I'm happy with this one.

My pick: Errant Ephemeron

Pack 3, Pick 2

Crookclaw Transmuter, Strength in Numbers, Errant Doomsayers, Corpulent Corpse, Pit Keeper, Divine Congregation, Jhoira's Timebug, Chameleon Blur, Subterranean Shambler, Telekinetic Sliver, Outrider en-Kor, Conflagrate, Flagstones of Trokair, Arena

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Outrider or **Crookclaw Transmuter**? On one hand, the Transmuter is another evasive threat that fits the curve a little bit better than another three drop. On the other hand, Outrider is fairly evasive too and can be searched out by the single **Amrou Scout**. This one might seem even, but looking at the deck gives heavy favoritism to the Outrider.

Don't get me wrong, the Transmuter is a great card. It's switching ability could come into play with the zealots, against **Dream Stalker**-type cards or even **Aetherflame Wall**. Yet for all that, it's still a one-toughness threat. The deck is laden with that particular fruit. Outrider is one of the very few effective blockers the deck has so far, and it's far more versatile on offense or defense than **Crookclaw Transmuter**. Its ability to be searched out is quite relevant, it doesn't get tapped by **Ivory Giant** shenanigans, and as a minor extra, it gets boosted by **Cavalry Master**. I'd be happy to add a Transmuter to the deck at some point, but the Outrider simply plays better with everything else we've drafted so far.

My pick: Outrider en-Kor

Pack 3, Pick 3

Snapback, Aether Web, Cloudchaser Kestrel, Drudge Reavers, Sage of Epityr, Ghitu Firebreathing, Momentary Blink, Careful Consideration, Thunder Totem, Brine Elemental, Norin the Wary, Withered Wretch, Keldon Halberdier

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A busted booster for the U/W mage. **Careful Consideration**, **Momentary Blink**, **Snapback**, and **Brine Elemental** are all great cards for these kinds of decks. The Kestrel and Totem, while adequate, don't offer as much punch as these four. So again we ask what does this deck want? What does this deck need?

In a way this deck is short. It's missing extra aggression, but it's also short the defenses needed to compensate. It has critter kill of a sort, but it's definitely missing consistency. It has card advantage, kind of, but if it's not working everything else falls apart. Essentially, this deck is divided. I'm happy I moved to the Zealot territory, because it gave the deck the best chance of succeeding, but it's so inflexible. And therein lies the answer. The deck has some power, but it needs more flexibility. That was the motivation of the Errant pick earlier, and it's what the deck needs to give itself the best chance of winning the queue. We've got some early drops, and triple 3/3 fliers for late. That middle stage, where the deck could go aggro or defensive, needs bolstering. Which card here is the most flexible, and works well on both offense and defense? I like the one that's cheap and stays useful at all parts of the game. It has to be **Snapback**. It's not quite as strong defensively as **Momentary Blink**, nor quite as strong offensively as **Brine Elemental**, nor does it overwhelm a stalemate like **Careful Consideration**. It just has a piece of everything, and it gives options to a deck that really needs them.

My pick: Snapback

Pack 3, Pick 4

Flowstone Channeler, Trespasser il-Vec, Fortify, Spiketail Drakeling, Skulking Knight, Mwonvuli Acid-Moss, Viashino Bladescout, Ophidian Eye, Fungal Reaches, Phyrexian Totem, Orgg, Screeching Sliver

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Yay, another spell. **Spiketail Drakeling** is fine and all, but **Fortify** is more of that flexibility the deck craves. Turning all those puny Zealots into marauders in the endgame will probably be a necessity. As the deck is mostly creatures anyway, I can't imagine how Spiketail does more damage to an opponent than a well-timed **Fortify**.

My pick: Fortify

Pack 3, Pick 5

Spinneret Sliver, Ivory Giant, Mindstab, Watcher Sliver, Blazing Blade Askari, Glass Asp, Traitor's Clutch, Plunder, Primal Forcemage, Urza's Factory, Kher Keep

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A second **Ivory Giant** is exciting. Partially by design and partially by failed signals, most of the creatures in the deck are white. **Ivory Giant** plays nicely with that attribute and is a decent threat on his own. **Watcher Sliver** actually has some credibility here alongside Pulmonic and Venser's, but not quite enough to offset picking up a second **Ivory Giant**. More chances for **Fog/Falter** tricks via **Momentary Blink** are enough to seal the deal.

My pick: Ivory Giant

Pack 3, Pick 6

Aether Web, Drudge Reavers, Cancel, Bewilder, Call to the Netherworld, Cyclopean Giant, Brass Gnat, Assembly-Worker, Hypergenesis, Unstable Mutation

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I glossed over the **Unstable Mutation** at the first go around, erroneously. If you're going to play the card, U/W is a fine deck for it. It's a remarkably narrow card though, and I'm not sure this deck truly wants it. Infinite shadow and

flight seems ideal, but it's actually the opposite. For cards like **Unstable Mutation**, I want them to create unblockables, not just enhance the ones I already have. If my guys above and guys below are dealing damage, that should be enough. Should I play against a deck that's all about the race, than **Unstable** can turn things around. That's a good enough reason to take it here, even though I doubt I would have maindecked it. As it was, I grabbed **Assembly-Worker** as a general blocker, specifically towards **Corpulent Corpse**. Probably a mistake, but for this deck, not a major one

My pick: **Assembly-Worker**

Pack 3, Pick 7

Mindstab, **Nantuko Shaman**, **Sangrophage**, **D'Avenant Healer**, **Wormwood Dryad**, **Mystical Teachings**, **Ignite Memories**, **Paradox Haze**, **Squire**

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I was all set to grab the **Squire**, but in a rare turn of events, there was something better to find in **D'Avenant Healer**. To tell the truth, the Healer adds almost nothing to the deck and this could easily have been a hate draft. What *that* card is is anyone's guess, although I suppose **Nantuko Shaman** would have been decent. For this pick, if there was a deck that was really vulnerable to one-toughness killing, it was going to be *really* punished.

My pick: **D'Avenant Healer**

Pack 3, Pick 8

Mindlash Sliver, **Havenwood Wurm**, **Chameleon Blur**, **Flickering Spirit**, **Ghitu Firebreathing**, **Opaline Sliver**, **Paradise Plume**, **Feldon's Cane**

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This pick was half defensive draft and half taking the strongest card. **Flickering Spirit** fits the deck slightly better, but I was far less concerned with their Spirit than some crazy Sliver army. Keep in mind I had already given up **Telekinetic**, **Essence**, and **Watcher Sliver**, and those were just the in-color ones. **Hivestone** and **Venser's** were effective counters, but there's no reason to force me in a position to draw those cards. **Opaline's** not bad on its own, it gets even better with **Pulmonic**, and it slightly lessens the chance of being blown out by an opponent. **Flickering Spirit** and **Opaline Sliver** were close enough in power that I didn't mind dipping a little bit in one to get all those other advantages.

My pick: **Opaline Sliver**

Pack 3, Pick 9

Children of Korlis, **Sangrophage**, **Viashino Bladescout**, **Mystical Teachings**, **Gustcloak Cavalier**, **Swarmyard**, **Pandemonium**

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I want them playing **Bladescout**, I can't prevent them from getting a **Mystical Teachings**, and this is not a deck for **Gustcloak Cavalier** (if such a thing exists). What's left but a card that usually backfires for its controller? I say usually, but the possibility for success is there. Was there.

My pick: **Pandemonium**

Pack 3, Pick 10

Crookclaw Transmuter, **Corpulent Corpse**, **Divine Congregation**, **Jhoira's Timebug**, **Chameleon Blur**, **Subterranean Shambler**

Thanks to that erroneous **Assembly-Worker** pick, I can take the far more relevant **Crookclaw Transmuter** without any fear. Hmm, these grapes taste like cognitive dissonance.

My pick: **Crookclaw Transmuter**

Pack 3, Pick 11

Aether Web, **Drudge Reavers**, **Sage of Epityr**, **Ghitu Firebreathing**, **Thunder Totem**

Aether Web is a fairly relevant card to hate away, certainly more game-affecting than a 2/2 flier with an upkeep cost.

My pick: **Aether Web**

Pack 3, Pick 12

Skulking Knight, **Viashino Bladescout**, **Ophidian Eye**, **Screeching Sliver**

I should have taken **Ophidian Eye** here, as I want them playing everything else. Don't worry, this pick does not come back to haunt me.

My pick: **Screeching Sliver**

Pack 3, Pick 13

Glass Asp, Traitor's Clutch, Plunder

My pick: Traitor's Clutch

Pack 3, Pick 14

Drudge Reavers, Call to the Netherworld

Call to the Netherworld this late? That's madness!

Pick: Call to the Netherworld

Pack 3, Pick 15

Paradox Haze

The second time this card was fifteenth pick. What are the odds?

My pick: Paradox Haze

Final analysis

A lot of guys, but a few good spells for balance. While the Zealot tangent was the way to go, the deck picked up enough alternative threats to not make wins and losses totally dependent on the little 1/1s. There were a few parts where things could have gone differently, but the white was rock solid the whole time. Blue was less so, but what it did offer was a strong enhancement to those themes, as well as providing critical flexibility and threat diversion. Overall I liked the draft. Here's the final decklist:

U/W Time Spiral Draft Deck		
Main Deck		Sideboard
40 cards		
7 Island	1 Ancestral Vision	1 Aether Web
10 Plains	1 Chromatic Star	1 Assembly-Worker
17 lands	1 Fortify	1 Call to the Netherworld
	1 Momentary Blink	1 Chronatog Totem
	1 Snapback	1 D'Avenant Healer
	5 other spells	1 Drifter il-Dal
1 Amrou Scout		1 Hivestone
2 Castle Raptors		1 Jedit's Dragoons
1 Cavalry Master		1 Lightning Axe
1 Crookclaw Transmuter		1 Pandemonium
1 Errant Ephemeron		2 Paradox Haze
1 Fledgling Mawcor		1 Return to Dust
2 Ivory Giant		1 Saltcrusted Steppe
1 Opaline Sliver		1 Screeching Sliver
1 Outrider en-Kor		2 Sidewinder Sliver
1 Pulmonic Sliver		1 Slipstream Serpent
1 Venser's Sliver		1 Thrill of the Hunt
1 Viscerid Deepwalker		1 Traitor's Clutch
4 Zealot il-Vec		1 Trickbind
18 creatures		1 Urza's Factory
		22 sideboard cards

The one card I'm sure is a mistake in there is that **Viscerid Deepwalker**. With just seven Islands and two **Ivory Giants**, it's unlikely to come out ASAP or be a strong force once it is in play. The Star was included to add consistency to the deck, even though **Lightning Axe** didn't make the final build. Were I to do it over, I'd take out Deepwalker and maybe the Star for some combination of **Trickbind**, **Slipstream Serpent**, and/or **Jedit's Dragoons**. In practice, sideboarding looked like exactly that.

So after all those heuristics and debate, how did the deck actually do? A fair question, but you'll have to wait a little longer. As suggested by a number of people, the draft walkthrough was entwined with a game walkthrough. It turned out to be a great choice, as these were some very interesting games. Unfortunately we're out of time for this week, so that will have to be covered at a later point. Enjoy the rest of *Planar Chaos* previews and thanks for reading.



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