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The Shift Key

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 Limited Information
 Tuesday, January 30, 2007



Welcome yet again to another round of Limited Information. We ended last week with [some mulligan scenarios](#), which generated quite a bit of discussion! Here are these hands again, as well as how the readers voted, and my own take.

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RULES

RULES

Would you mulligan this hand?

| | | |
|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| No | 10012 | 78.6% |
| Yes | 2720 | 21.4% |
| Total | 12732 | 100.0% |





Verdict:



Would you mulligan this hand?

| | | |
|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Yes | 9687 | 90.1% |
| No | 1069 | 9.9% |
| Total | 10756 | 100.0% |



Verdict:





Would you mulligan this hand?

| | | |
|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| No | 5194 | 53.6% |
| Yes | 4499 | 46.4% |
| Total | 9693 | 100.0% |

Verdict:



Would you mulligan this hand?

| | | |
|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| Yes | 5352 | 60.5% |
| No | 3499 | 39.5% |
| Total | 8851 | 100.0% |

Verdict:



| Would you mulligan this hand? | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Yes | 7072 | 70.5% |
| No | 2965 | 29.5% |
| Total | 10037 | 100.0% |

Verdict:

With that unpleasantness taken care of, let's enjoy Timeshifted Week! For the *Planar Chaos* version, I'm going to go in a different direction than the rating system of yore. This week I'll address how limited archetypes have shifted to incorporate the brand new set. In some cases *Planar Chaos* adds very little, while in others PC completely redefines the combination. Here's an opening foray into these new roles, with a look at where the archetype has been and where it's going. Presented in Nostalgo-Vision™.

Green/White

What it loses: Combat tricks, deep speed

What it gains: Removal, fliers, thalids

In triple T, G/W was a combination known for hardcore aggression and little else. It didn't have the cards to play control, but it did have the excellent **Strength in Numbers** and **Thrill of the Hunt** for dealing extra-efficient damage. Some early suspend creatures combined with a green fatty or two and **Temporal Isolation** was enough to steal games against stronger but slower builds. Green/White's lack of flexibility was a hindrance, but *Time Spiral*'s version of the combination was a better showing than almost all previous Limited incarnations.

Losing a pack of *Time Spiral* does hurt the core plan, but in return the colors gain the two best charms (they cost two for a reason people!), a surprising quantity of fliers, and some very strong removal. White provides more for the deck overall, but **Uktabi Drake** and (obviously) **Hedge Troll** are both excellent in the colors. Pick up the Thrills extra high in TS and try to grab the amazing **Pallid Mycoderm** in PC. G/W plays best when it stays focused on its core goals, speedy and efficient aggression.



Black/Blue

What it loses: Madness outlets, madness cards

What it gains: Removal, flexibility

Black/Blue in *Spiral* was half madness and half control. The combination had oodles of card advantage; all it needed was the time to get it rolling. The deck could occasionally get the speedy evasion draw, but it was usually interested in using black kill cards and blue card draw to reach an insurmountable position. Done right, B/U was one of the strongest archetypes in TTT.

Planar Chaos mucks things a bit. On the one hand, black and blue have the highest concentration of Limited duds. That being said, blue gets a dash of fairly effective removal, which alongside black's goodies in *Spiral* make it a premiere creature-killing combo. While **Brain Gorgers** and **Muck Drubb** are both reasonable madness cards, it's the surprisingly potent **Ridged Kusite** that offers the efficient outlet. With a serious lack of quality guys, morphs and cards like **Pongify** go up in value, where pricey madness cards and flimsy removal like **Gorgon Recluse** and **Assassinate** drop down. The colors are a lot more aggressive now, because they have to be. B/U is still good, but not on the level of pre-*Chaos*.

Red/White

What it loses: Plentiful removal, awkward mana curves

What it gains: Heavier sliver components, more evasion

TTT R/W was a bit of a mess. White creatures with red burn have been tearing up Constructed, but Limited's a thornier situation. A lot of the strategies inherent to each color simply don't play well with the other. White's interest in itself was counterproductive to red's frequent color hunger. It wasn't all bad, **Undying Rage** is excellent on Benalish Calvary and there's **Desolation Giant**... There were ways to make it work, but all in all it was one of the weaker combos in the format.

Things get a little more interesting with *Planar Chaos*, mostly due to two big commons: **Sinew Sliver** and **Stingscourger**. The sliver is excellent on its own and with multiples, but plays particularly well alongside *Time Spiral* red's crop. **Watcher** and **Bonesplitter** did look good together, but was generally a touch on the slow side. **Sinew Sliver** into Two-Headed into **Bonesplitter** on the other hand is fast and resilient. The real gem to the color combination is the excellent **Stingscourger**. This goblin gives the deck amazing late game power, as his



cheap casting cost and effect is exactly what this deck needs to push through the final few points. More on this guy later. Tip from the top: Play this in Red/White.

Black/Green

What it loses: Uhhhh...

What it gains: Errrr...

It was a frequent discussion from the internet pundits: what was the worst color in *Time Spiral* Limited? The general consensus was "not blue or red" but past that there was serious disagreement. Black and green definitely had their champions for receiving top honors. Putting them together seemed like suicide, yet strangely it kind of worked. The deck was extremely non-cohesive, yet its game of "throwing big spells at an opponent until they cried uncle" did do the trick. If the player could keep his or her mana costs down and played enough general quality, the B/G deck could flail out enough potency to do an opponent in. It wasn't my favorite combination, but in a pinch it could do the job.

Unfortunately, B/G loses a lot by gaining a pack of PC. The Arabian timeshifted **Fa'adiyah Seer** is a fair madness helper, and **Kor Dirge** is great with green fatties. Once again though, you've got almost no internal synergy. The best you can do is get the quick green beaters like **Mire Boa** and **Giant Dustwasp**, then use the rest of large casting costs in black and green to finish the job. Hopefully everyone around you is drafting white and blue cards, because if you're getting cut in this combination, things are not going to end well.

Red/Blue

What it loses: Storm and suspend

What it gains: Aggression and tempo

Within triple Spiral, Red/Blue was considered top of the line in deck technology. The reasons were partially due to preponderances of power, but R/U had the added benefit of extremely synergistic cards. Suspend is a prime Limited mechanic, and red and blue played the role nicely. Besides just being mana efficient, the suspend cards also played well alongside red's key **Empty the Warrens**. All that plus the insanity that is **Coal Stoker** and morph made Red/Blue a very powerful archetype. While there could be better decks, a well-honed Red/Blue was a scary deck indeed.

Planar Chaos changes the landscape. One less pack of strong suspend cards, and in particular one less pack of **Empty the Warrens** and **Grapeshot**, does deal a serious blow to the original scheme. Red/Blue is not left high and dry though. **Erratic Mutation** and **Shaper Parasite** are both strong removal cards in an unexpected color, which gives the deck more aggressive capabilities. **Stingscourger** and **Gossamer Phantom** further cement this new role. The colors remain very strong; the execution just needs a little tinkering. For drafting this combination in TTP, either pick **Warrens** extra high or forgo them entirely for more reliable, aggressive cards like **Stormcloud Djinn** and **Buzzardiers**. The deck remains a key player.



Black/White

What it loses: Suckiness

What it gains: Viability

The largest shift in playability from TTT to TTP is definitely the Black/White deck. Pre-Planar, the combination was a complete disaster. Heavy white cards competed with heavy black cards for some bizarre control/aggro mishmash. If there were enough individually powerful cards (on the order of **Sengir Nosferatu** and **Magus of the Disk**) the deck could win, but requiring bombs on that level is hardly a ringing endorsement. Being a first order masochist I tried to make this deck work time and again, usually ending in disappointment and being lighter three packs.

What a difference a release makes. Black/White went from depressing to powerful on the back of two cards: **Dauthi Trapper** and **Blightspeaker**. The **Blightspeaker** in particular is especially strong, being flexible early and a victory condition later. Black and white get large additions of rebels to their teams, making any rebel searcher a very high pick. The addition of white's solid removal and black's synergistic guys further enhance the combination. B/W is now a pretty strong midrange deck, using point removal early to overwhelm the opponent later under streams of card advantage and life loss. The biggest problem with the archetype is that it wants *so many* cards in PC it can be hard making the best decision. Let's not get started on the awesomeness that is **Big Game Hunter**. That being said, there are worse places to be. Pick up those **Amrou Scouts** early in *Time Spiral* and you'll get the hookup two packs down.

Red/Green

What it loses: Storm, confusion

What it gains: Flexibility, good mana

I've said on these pages a number of times how much I enjoy *Time Spiral* Limited. One of the reasons for that is the sheer array of strategies available to the drafter, even within a single combination. No color scheme better emphasized this than R/G, which had potential but suffered from divisiveness. R/G could play the big beater route, or the speedy sliver route, or the **Empty the Warrens/Strength in Numbers** route. Of these I felt the Empty plan was the strongest, a ranking shared by many of the top pros. The issue with R/G was that each style had very different pick orders, and didn't particularly play well with the

others. A choice of **Spinneret Sliver**, **Keldon Halberdiers**, and **Penumbra Spider** could all be justified based on what kind of deck you were aiming for. Unfortunately, splitting your focus usually ended badly.

Planar Chaos provides some good overlap. **Prodigal Pyromancer**, **Stingscourger**, and **Pyrohemia** play excellently no matter what you're shooting for. **Battering Sliver** too plays multiple roles, and **Skirk Shaman** is completely reasonable if you have the double red consistently. Like red/blue, the storm plan took a big hit with this set. **Strength in Numbers** is still a high pick for its efficiency and specialized role, but **Empty the Warrens** is a little tougher to evaluate. Before I'd be angling to force the deck if I was with R/G. Now I'll take those types only if my neighbor makes it very clear the way is open. Otherwise, either the fatties or slivers play very great in *Planar Chaos* alongside Spiral cards.

Red/Black

What it loses: Bad creatures, good removal
What it gains: Decent creatures, adequate removal

Red/Black, the notorious elim combination, was an interesting animal in TTT. **Strangling Soot** was the MVP card, but some R/B decks were so loaded with removal they couldn't put the pressure on to finish the job. The creatures were drafted as an afterthought, sometimes so much so that Red/Black's opponent could get back in the game. This wasn't so much a flaw with the combination as a snare to avoid while drafting the deck.

Planar Chaos changes the tenor with much better creatures for both colors, at the expense of some of the harder removal spells. **Melancholy** is fine, but it's no Soot or **Dark Withering**. Red's **Brute Force** fits the deck quite well, as it's efficient at shoring up R/B's overall dearth of combative guys. Both colors got a big boost in creature quality with *Planar Chaos*, but they're still below most of the other combinations. There's not much of an adjustment needed to handle the new set. In fact, things get easier with two boosters providing abundant removal and one with abundant creatures. Red/Black was a high end combination in TTT, and should remain so for TTP.

Green/Blue

What it loses: Good creatures, bad spells
What it gains: Worse creatures, removal

Green/Blue was one of the tougher decks to pull off in triple *Time Spiral*. Blue's inherent strengths could take you far, which was good since green didn't add a lot of the deck. Some mana fixing in **Search for Tomorrow**, perhaps a **Thallid Shell-Dweller** to play D while **Errant Ephemeron** wound down. The deck had a serious problem with creature suppression, although on the rare times that it was taken care of the deck worked alright. A pair of **Snapbacks**, maybe a **Riftwing Cloudskate**, alongside **Durkwood Baloths** and **Scarwood Treefolk**, does play well. Those blue cards remain very high picks though, making the deck a bit of a crapshoot. When it worked it was fine, when it didn't...

Planar Chaos again adds removal where there wasn't before. **Erratic Mutation** is a great trick on both ends, and fits the curve of G/U particularly well. In the crazy new universe, not only does the blue half add removal, the green part brings extra fliers to the party! While I have yet to draft this combination personally in TTP, I've heard some good things about its current viability. With a smoother curve, synergy, and genuine critter kill, G/U could be a sleeper hit of the new Limited.

Blue/White

What it loses: Hyper speed, efficient suspend
What it gains: Removal, control options

Blue/white was one of the scariest decks in the olden days of TTT. The blue bounce and white suppression was just enough interaction to let the rest of the team blaze through. **Momentary Blink** in particular played havoc with an opponent through a variety of tricks, most notably **Ivory Giant**/Ensnare shenanigans. Blue/white wasn't consistently the best deck, but a really powerful U/W deck could beat anything else just through evasion and speed.

Unfortunately, the loss of a pack does ding this model. *Planar Chaos* just doesn't offer the singular speed that *Time Spiral* did. That being said, *Planar Chaos* does offer a lot of control elements for the W/U deck, giving the build plenty of flexibility. You can still go aggro with **Shade of Trokair** and **Gossamer Phantom**, but now you also have the choice of control options with **Sunstrafe**, **Shaper Parasite**, and **Humble**. Blue and White as the removal-heavy colors? Weird. Anyway, staying alive and taking card advantage through the white gating team is just as viable as speedy beats were before. What the deck lost in quickness, it gained in spades in flexibility and late game strength. (**Malach of the Dawn** = scary uncommon) Blue/white is still a very strong archetype.

Before I wrap things up for the week, I'd like to go over a few *Planar Chaos* cards of note. This certainly isn't an exhaustive list, but these are spells of interest; cards we'll be seeing for some time to come.

Stingscourger: I love this guy so very much. He gets my vote as the consistently strongest common in *Planar Chaos*. If that seems odd for a 2/2 for two, than you haven't played against him yet. His effect on the game is staggering, and he single-handedly improves multiple archetypes. Besides his excellence on the tempo side, he plays defense very well. No one wants to waste a removal spell on a pre-echoed creature, yet if they don't, the Stingscourger provides two turns of



relative safety. Strength on so many facets, with such a cheap casting cost, makes the little goblin a premiere player in every deck he finds himself in. He'll be warping Limited for a while yet.

Aven Riftwatcher: **Stingscourger** proof! I admit I wasn't very into this creature at first glance, but seeing it in play quickly changed those views. It's just big and annoying enough to gum up the board, yet not so powerful that you feel you want to expend a card on it. If you think people hate hitting an echo creature with removal, you should see someone struggle with targeting a creature with Vanishing. However **Aven Riftwatcher** dies, its caster is going to get a healthy shot of life to play around with. And of course, it's a *rebel*. Many a time I've been glad there's no rebel with three toughness to be searched out during my attack. The Riftwatcher throws a big wrench into that plan, making any attack with a 2/2, even a flier, a risky proposition. They got the stats on this guy just right to make him wholly irritating and influential.

Groundbreaker: I'd start at 14 life if my opponent started with six cards. I'd start at eight if my opponent began with five cards. 'Nuff said.

Ok that's not quite fair. **Lava Axe** does see play in Limited, and **Searing Flesh** is actually quite strong. The problem with Ball Lightning-esque cards is their unreliability. Much like **Browbeat**, an opponent can often choose to take the best option. That's a problem, especially since you're playing with potential card disadvantage, just to give your opponent the choice on how to minimize its impact. If you want to pick it up for the rare draft I understand, but as an actual limited starter, it would be a very unlikely include.

Harmonize: The one I can get behind. "Draw 3" is an effect that always plays well in Limited, this format being no exception. And this time, it's in a color that can get out lots of mana very quickly. This isn't just one of green's best uncommons, it's one of the best in the set. Don't let the simple text fool you. When your opponent casts this at any stage of the game, you're going to get a sharp, sinking feeling.

Damnation: Is good.

Kavu Predator: My pre-release deck had this guy plus **Fiery Justice**. The rest of the deck was horrid, but those two were worth the price of admission. Someone's already cast **Healing Leaves** on an opponent to pump this guy up.

Cradle to Grave: I started out playing this card like a removal spell, not realizing it was a **Remove Soul** in disguise. A **Remove Soul** with a drawback to tell the truth. It's not unplayable, but for a "destroy target creature" effect it's remarkably bad. I like to side these in on the draw, and take them out when playing first. Either way, you *can* run this, but hopefully you'll do better.

And that's all for this week. Any special cards you want to address from the new set? Share 'em in the forums. All the theory gets put into practice next week. Enjoy the new cards, and thanks for reading.



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