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# Act Two of Three

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Taste the Magic  
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Most of the visual interest in *Planar Chaos* comes from how the set "springboards" from its predecessor, *Time Spiral*. We'll have a look at what was set up in *Time Spiral*, and how *Planar Chaos* picks up the torch and trots it from the past to the alternate present with visual cues, graphic design and artist selection.

Let's start with an over-the-shoulder glance back at *Time Spiral* and its visual cues for specific mechanics. We haven't really allocated a venue to talk about the visual treatments for split second or suspend within the block, so now is as good a time as any as we work toward our new cue for vanishing.

## Split Second

The challenge of communicating time mechanics within a single-frame, still painting is that, well, it's a *time* mechanic within a *still* painting. For split second (whose working name was "superfast") we worked to manipulate how a single image can be sequential unto itself. The idea is both fairly simple and fairly effective. If a spell has an imagined timeline... before casting, during casting, after casting... you "jump-cut" out the middle and just represent the spell or target before and after, not during - as opposed to most visualizations of spells which tend to show them in the act of being cast. You can achieve a good amount of sequentialism within a solitary frame just by bearing in mind that (for English-reading audiences, anyway) viewers relate to an image basically the same way they read... left to right, top to bottom. For example, show a broken sword on the left side being hard-juxtaposed against the undamaged sword on the right, and it's intuitively interpreted as "the sword was repaired." Whole on the left and broken on the right, "the sword was destroyed."



Krosan Grip art by Zoltan Boros & Gabor Szikszai.

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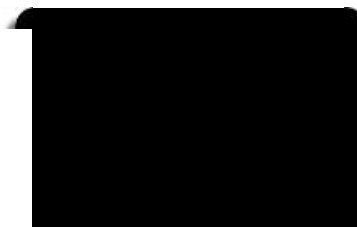
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Simple stuff, but effective. After the [styleguide](#) was completed I worked with (then) Art Director Jeremy Cranford to dummy-up a couple fast and loose examples that we could send to our illustrators who were given an art description that necessitated one of the visual cues. This was so they would all be starting from the same place, so to speak. It's worth noting that the few split second creatures in the two sets did not receive the jump-cut treatment.

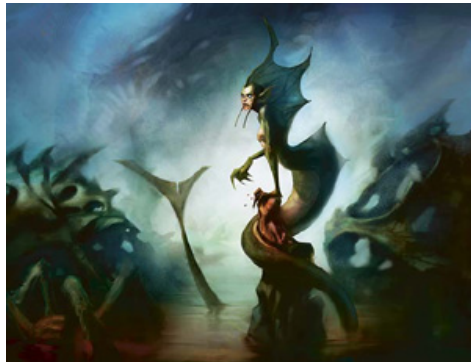




Again, if the idea is before and after, no middle, that's "here" and "not here" in summoning speak, and creature illustrations that are just missing half the creature would... well... suck.

## Morph

Between *Time Spiral* and *Planar Chaos*, Creative re-evaluated the necessity of cramming a morph spider as a visual cue into all cards with morph. In all honesty, the real morph visual cue has always been the card back in play on the table. By the time the card is face up, the cue is a moot point. It seemed important in *Time Spiral* to be consistent with cues, with so much of the set's emphasis being placed on recapturing the past and all. We did go out of our way to let artists know the 'spiders' could be seriously downplayed, so as to not tyrannize the illustrations. The subtle applications didn't hurt the art, and held with tradition.



*Coral Trickster* art by D. Alexander Gregory.



*Liege of the Pit* art by Jeremy Jarvis.



*Weathered Bodyguards art by Wayne Reynolds.*

That's right, around **Liege of the Pit's** mouth are the vestigial legs of his former morph spider. God, I'm witty. Anyway, fast forward to the alternate present. Not only was it a convenient time to unhitch the wagon from the spider as we were exploring how things "could have been," but it was officially deprioritized once Morph was added to Akroma, who had been chosen from the card file to commission as packaging art. Can you imagine Daren Bader's gorgeous painting of **Akroma, Angel of Fury** flying majestically in front of the sun with morph spider legs falling away from her? That would have, again... well... sucked. Once Akroma had a doctor's note excusing her from spider bites we gave the entire set an inoculation. Illustrators could add the cue if they wanted, and ignore it if they felt it cluttered or compromised their painting.



*Akroma, Angel of Fury art by Daren Bader.*

## Suspend

This mechanic (which was "delay" at the time) ended up being bit of a beating, both in concept and in application. R&D felt it important that the cue be substantial enough that suspend cards be identifiable as such in play and on the table. Working with what we understood the mechanic to be, here's the meandering tale of what we came up with. Years ago I saw an episode of the new "Twilight Zone" that followed the plight of a couple who had inadvertently slipped through the cracks of time and became privy to how time is created. Turns out, each single moment is created by a construction crew that meticulously creates the world in its entirety... every car, building, baby rattle and fire hydrant, then vacates as "real time approaches" and goes on to create the next minute from scratch. Mankind, unbeknownst to them, would appear in this newly constructed scene of space/time, live there for a single moment, then fade directly into the next chrono-vignette. And so on for all eternity.

I was enamored with pushing for a visualization of a similar concept, where the art depicts a scene of displaced time... a distorted moment, suspended in some sort of greenish blue æther-jelly crackling with the potential energy of the moment. This would be our stylized, monochromatic canvas for "real time" to push through, so we could see the creature or fireball (or whatever) making its way through this state of altered time until the last counter comes off of the card and hits your opponent in the face. Here are the loose concept paintings.

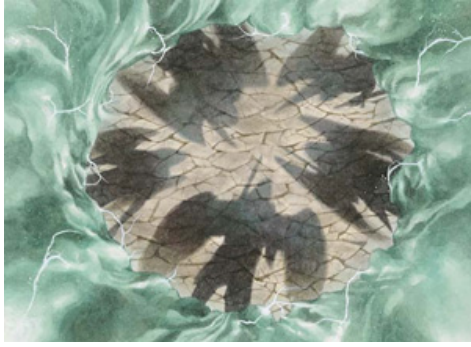


Notice the ghostly, distorted backgrounds, a turbulent moment contained in some sort of æther energy. The spell or creature pushes through in clarity and in color. Works, right? Time manipulation, an effect evoking "arriving," color cue visible on the table, hectic stylization of the temporal chaos and consequence of the block? Right?

Wrong. The concepts necessitated things we had not anticipated... a creature or lightning bolt pushing through a moment frozen in time jelly is one thing, but suspend *Wheel of Fate*? Suspend *Gain 20 Life*? Yikes. Plus (in retrospect not surprisingly) all of my patented crazy about "electric time æther" simply led to a truckload of art with a blue background. The anticipated stylishness, chaos, energy... pretty much lost. On top of that, such a demanding visual cue made the continuously evolving card file a real beating. If development felt the need to add or remove suspend from any given card in the file, the art now required a *major* overhaul (you know, to either make or unmake the background all blue-lookin'). Now, don't get me wrong, we're not batting zero here. After all, suspend does "read on the table," and we did get some very nice representations of this temporal anomaly. The more stylishly the individual artist handled the cue, the more successful the result.



*Ith, High Arcanist art by Zoltan Boros & Gabor Szikszai.*



*Divine Congregation art by Jeremy Jarvis.*



*Ancestral Vision art by Mark Poole.*



*Shivan Meteor art by Chippy.*

All of the above images are very nice representations of the cue's potential. Chippy's rendition of the massive fireball pushing through a localized area of disrupted time came out so well that one could certainly make the argument that it will stand as one of this block's iconic images.

## Vanishing

After the art for the *Time Spiral* set was completed, we set to task conceptualizing the visual for vanishing (which was always called "vanishing"). Why not simply treat vanishing as a bookend of Suspend? Why not show creatures and spells being engulfed by, say, red energy? Two reasons... I couldn't stomach a new set full of red (or whatever) backgrounds, and because we fully expected that at some point the card file would contain a creature that would suspend in and then vanish out, so I was insistent that the cues be able to coexist when/if this arose. So vanishing was conceptualized more simply.



*Tidewalker art by Dave Kendall.*



*Calciderm art by Dave Kendall.*



*Waning Wurm art by Alan Pollack.*

The creatures would be shown breaking down into a more localized, differently hued version of roiling suspend energy. That way, if worst came to worst, the creature could be dissolving red in front of that overwhelmingly blue background. It would be cluttered, but could coexist legibly. That worst-case card ended up *not* being included in the *Planar Chaos* card file, but that's how we got from point A to point B.



## The Ever-Changing Card File

A fair deal of *Planar Chaos*'s post-apocalyptic Dominaria ended up being a quite literal descendant of *Time Spiral*. With illustrations so specifically tied to each card, either by the abundance of visual cues or by the specific people, places or images quoted in the art, if the card the art was commissioned for moved just a bit mechanic-wise we now had art that did not make sense on its card. At one point our card art Graveyard reached around 30 homeless *Time Spiral* illustrations. Brady really came through as Johnny-on-the-spot, rescuing Graveyarded TSP art and working closely with the *Planar Chaos* developers to find (and create) card homes for these illustrations.

Here are a few examples of *Time Spiral* art that received some postponed lovin' in PLC.



*Dust Elemental art by rk post.*



*Dash Hopes art by Zoltan Boros & Gabor Szikszai.*



*Saltfield Recluse art by Brian Despain.*

This happened much more sparingly with *Planar Chaos* commissions, namely due to a redoubled effort to improve communication about changes in the card file. Here is one Planar Casualty: Mark Tedin's sketch for a "white **Memory Lapse**." We caught it quickly enough to save Mr. Tedin the trouble of painting out a defunct card, but it's heartbreaking for obvious reasons to see this lie dormant at sketch stage.



#100667 - DELAY THE INEVITABLE - A MAGIC-USER IS CASTING A SPELL THAT "SPLITS" HIS MEMORY (DEPICTED AS SLICES WITH PATTERNS OF LIGHT & IMAGES FROM THE PAST) INTO THE AIR, DEFLECTING AN INCOMING JET OF DESTRUCTIVE ENERGY THAT'S SMATTERING THE SLICES. THE CROSS SECTIONS AREN'T FLESH, BUT A SEMI-TRANSPARENT SUBSTANCE THAT ISN'T GROSS-LOOKING, BUT SPECTRAL IN NATURE. THE WIZARD LOSES THE BATTLE

## Card Frames

Mark has written about this in [his column](#), so I won't belabor the topic too much. *Time Spiral's* timeshifted subset clearly said past in a very on-the-nose way: by simply reprinting the cards in the old, nostalgic frame. We had to create something new, and execute it carefully, so that *Planar Chaos's* alternate present card subset would feel tied enough to the current frames to say *alternate* and not just *new*, which is trickier than you think, as they are simply "new." Cranford tasked our talented Graphic Designers with creating card frames that appeared to be a viable extension of the old frames, as if our Eighth Edition redesign had gone a different, but lateral, direction. They are believable as an tangential design direction, are discernable when in play or fanned across your hand with "normal" cards, and do a great deal toward helping the card art communicate "alternate."



## The Art!

Potentially, one of the biggest guns that a Creative Team has is the Art Director's ability to custom cater the artist pool to communicate the message of the project. Jeremy Cranford (in *Time Spiral* and the beginning of *Planar Chaos*) and I (end of *Planar Chaos* and then through *Future Sight*) made every effort to employ this tactic to help communicate the past/present/future meta-message of this block. Artists with a nostalgic tie to the history of the game were brought back and moved to the fore in *Time Spiral* to visually shout "past." In *Planar Chaos*, the goal was to put together a talent roster that would nail the current look, vibe and feel of contemporary **Magic**, but with artists who are new additions to the visual landscape of the game. Several of these painters had a brief toe in the water with *Coldsnap*, then were counter-laden in the suspend zone during *Time Spiral* in favor of illustrators who packed a nostalgia-punch, and finally arrived back in *Planar Chaos* for a taste of "contemporary and alternate." Each of these artists was expected to bring to the table the skill set that we look for in **Magic** art today: visual communication, the ability to capture tone and vibe, strong compositional skills and a high level of painterly finish. Just like the alternate card frames, these artists are great examples of what **Magic** hasn't been, but absolutely could be.

Artist	Website
 Volkan Baga	<a href="http://www.volkanbaga.de">www.volkanbaga.de</a>
 Steven Belledin	<a href="http://www.stevenbelledin.com">www.stevenbelledin.com</a>
 Dave DeVries	<a href="http://www.themonsterengine.com/art.html">www.themonsterengine.com/art.html</a>
 Dan Dos Santos	<a href="http://www.dandossantos.com">www.dandossantos.com</a>
 Steve Ellis	<a href="http://www.hyperactiveart.com">www.hyperactiveart.com</a>
 E.M. Gist	<a href="http://www.erikgist.com/gistbio.html">www.erikgist.com/gistbio.html</a>
 Dave Kendall	<a href="http://www.rustybaby.com">www.rustybaby.com</a>
 William O'Connor	<a href="http://www.wocillo.com">www.wocillo.com</a>
 Steve Prescott	<a href="http://www.rotface.com">www.rotface.com</a>
 James Wong	<a href="http://www.jameskwong.com">www.jameskwong.com</a>

There it is - an overview of the bits, pieces, and people that position *Planar Chaos* quite nicely as the second of our three-act block.

JJ



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