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Are You From the Future?

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Latest Developments
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As *Future Sight* underwent the changes all sets do in development, trying to adhere to a set of guidelines regarding which *Future Sight* cards were supposed to be "timeshifted" and which were supposed to be "normal" was a challenge for the developers. The timeshifted cards were, as a group, supposed to be indicative of the game's future, mainly by highlighting things we "haven't done yet"—either extrapolations of existing mechanics or bizarre new lines of text.

To me, the problem with that separation is that extrapolations and bizarre lines of text appear in lots of **Magic** sets; they aren't something we're saving for some who-knows-when future date. Just look at *Ravnica* block and you'll see stuff like "protection from multicolored," "nonbasic landwalk," "Players can't search libraries this turn," and "If *Leyline of Life* is in your opening hand, you may begin the game with it in play," all stuff that probably would have qualified to be timeshifted had we saved it all for *Future Sight*.

The truth is, no matter what set we're working on, we're looking for new lines of text that have never appeared on **Magic** cards. Technically we've never put the line "Enchanted creature gets +3/+4." on a card before, but I guarantee that if that was submitted as a *Future Sight* timeshifted card, it wouldn't have lasted very long.

Over time, I, like many other doubters, came to understand that this set would feel like "the future" and not just any normal **Magic** set full of new ideas ("the present") as long as we had a high number of varied different approaches and ideas and as long as some significant number of *those* pushed the boundaries farther than a normal set might normally choose to do.

That said, it still wasn't easy for Development to maintain that line, as there was so much gray area. Some were easy—*Bridge from Below*, sure. *Spellweaver Volute*, sure. The cards are unique in and of themselves, but they also hint at whole categories of cards—things that only work in the graveyard, things that enchant stuff in zones other than in play—that we haven't done yet. They do a great job of giving players a glimpse into a potential future.

Similarly, the "evolved keywords" were easy to keep on the timeshifted side of the line. We've done plenty of cycling and echo cards before, but never the following variations:

- Cycling—Sacrifice a land.
- Cycling—Pay 2 life.
- Wizardcycling ③
- Slivercycling ③
- Echo—Discard a card.
- Echo—Sacrifice two lands.
- Echo ① (a different color than the card itself)
- Echo ① (with a drawback that occurs if the ① is actually paid)

The last ability on the list, from *Shah of Naar Isle*, would have felt even more unique if it was possible to template it the way the card was designed: "Echo—Each opponent draws three cards." The problem was that having an opponent draw cards didn't work well as a cost within the rules; if an opponent had fewer than three cards left, he wouldn't lose when the echo was paid for running out of cards, instead the echo couldn't actually be paid at all. As we believed that to be counterintuitive, we opted for something less unique but more understandable.

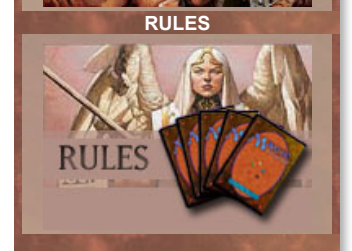
Had the echo costs that were different than the cards' mana costs from *Planar Chaos* (*Uktabi Drake*, *Stingscourger*) appeared in *Future Sight* instead, they would have been timeshifted, which is funny because they were *not* timeshifted in *Planar Chaos*.

The other group of future "timeshifted" cards that were easy to maintain were those that were given keywords for already existing abilities under the pretense that "in the future, these will be keyworded."

- Shroud
- Lifelink
- Poisonous
- Deathtouch
- Reach



From the future?



Note that the deathtouch ability has never been on a creature straight-up before (the two cards that mimic it are **Cruel Deceiver** and **Venomous Fangs**), but it is an attempt to consolidate all the myriad ever-so-slightly-different Basilisk and Gorgon abilities we've done over the years (and there are a lot of them) into something we'd be comfortable repeating over and over again.

With that stuff out of the way, I want to look at a handful of cards that weren't quite so easy to justify as timeshifted.

Muraganda Petroglyphs

We have certainly hinted at creatures having no abilities on cards that remove abilities like **Humility** and **Ovinize**, and we've given a subset of creatures +2/+2 before as well on **Day of Destiny**. The breakthrough on this particular card, then, is the direct benefiting of creatures with no abilities.

There are essentially only two kinds of creatures that will benefit from this card—creatures with empty text boxes and tokens that aren't granted abilities by the card that makes them. Fortunately, there are an abundance of both kinds of cards in *Future Sight*.

The reason I'm happy to say that this card is "from the future" as opposed to being something we'll be doing on a regular basis is the amount of rules knowledge necessary to understand how the card works in all situations. For example, **Grizzly Bears** gets +2/+2 from this card. **Grizzly Bears** enchanted with **Flight** ("Enchanted creature has flying.") does not, as now it has an ability. **Grizzly Bears** enchanted with **Cloak of Mists** ("Enchanted creature is unblockable.") *does* still get +2/+2, however, as the Aura isn't technically giving any abilities to the creature. And trust me, that's an easy example.

Bonded Fetch

While **Bonded Fetch**'s first line of text is technically new, it's composed of old keywords that represent even older abilities, and the second line appears on cards all the time, including **Merfolk Looter** and **Thought Courier**.

The "crazy new thing" about the card is the fact that it has the unusual combination of defender and haste. We've never done that before. Of course, we'd never done a *negative*-power creature with double strike either, but **Char-Rumbler** isn't timeshifted. If there was one card in *Future Sight* that is timeshifted that I feel probably shouldn't have been, it's **Bonded Fetch**.

There were discussions during development, however, that could have really cemented the fetch as a futuristic card. It was Matt Cavotta, I believe, that came up with the ability name "skillhaste" that would have meant "This creature can use abilities the turn it comes into play" but not allow the creature to attack. I thought there was some interesting space there—a card like **Viashino Fangtail** with skillhaste would be able to ping the turn you played it, but not attack for 3. Pretty neat. But the word didn't pick up enough supporters to warrant an increase in the number of keywords in the set, which is already at an all-time high.

Ghostfire

We have certainly done characteristic-defining—or, more specifically, color-defining—text on cards before. See **Crookshank Kobolds** and **Ancestral Vision** for examples. We've also given color to colorless cards before; just look at **Transguild Courier**.

But what we haven't done is make a colored card colorless all the time. (Some, like **Ghostflame Sliver**, are colorless in play but not everywhere else.) As far as I was concerned, this card would qualify for "timeshifted" status if and only if we were willing to give it a colorless frame. If the frame was just going to be red and spell out in the text box that it was colorless, that wouldn't be new enough.

There was a bit of resistance to the colorless frame idea from people hoping to save it for the day we theoretically do spells that actually cost just colorless mana to play (a sorcery that cost $\{c\}$, for instance), but I felt we had set precedence with **Transguild Courier** and wanted to make the frame match what color the card actually was and not what color mana it took to play it. Others soon agreed, and the card was given an awesome colorless frame.

Boldwyr Intimidator

The "future" shtick with the Intimidator is that it mentions a creature type that isn't (yet) supported in the game—and a particularly hilarious one at



that. The Coward-Warrior interaction is terrifically flavorful, and that's why this card "works."

I do think, however, that the card would work essentially the same mechanically if we used existing types (Sheep can't block Wolves or something like that), but we were looking for every possible excuse to make things "timeshifted" that the Coward thing survived intact from the moment the card was designed. I never expected our creative team to go through with it, but hats off to them for doing so.

The Most "Future" Card of All

The "creature type that doesn't exist yet" joke actually began life on a different card, the one which would eventually become **Steamflogger Boss**. Here's what design handed over:

Splorg Lord
2RR
Creature – Goblin Splorg
3/3

R, Sacrifice a Goblin: All Splorgs gain double strike until end of turn.

R, Sacrifice a Splorg: All Goblins gain +2/+0 until end of turn.

The joke is that "Splorg is a type that doesn't exist yet," but I found that statement difficult to accept because when I read the type line of the creature itself, I see "Splorg" as its creature type, which means it in fact *does* exist right now. Saying Splorg doesn't exist yet is like saying **Wasp** and **Sand** and **Thundermare** don't exist yet simply because we haven't made several of them. And of course, as detailed in [a recent Ask Wizards](#), any time we mention a creature type, there's at least one card that has it: **Mistform Ultimus**.

To me, the *best* way to show "the future" of **Magic** was to show something that didn't actually work in the game currently. To use a co-worker's analogy, if I took a flash drive back to the 1800s, the people there wouldn't know what in the world to do with it, but they could theoretically accept that it was futuristic.

I felt that one carefully placed "joke" of text that meant nothing at all right now—as opposed to the rest of the set, which works just fine—would lead to some great conversations and speculation. So I wrote an email to the *Future Sight* development team suggesting such cards. I listed the following:

Splorg Lord
3R
Creature – Goblin Splorg
3/3

Other Splorgs get +1/+1 and gain Islandwalk.

If a Splorg you control would harvest a resource, you may have it erect a monument instead.

Other possibilities...

If a Splorg you control would erect a monument, it erects two monuments instead.

Other Splorgs you control may attack and block as if the "five-second rule" didn't apply to them.

Whenever you activate a possess ability of a Splorg, you may ignore all Superstitions this turn.

Splorg cards you own in Limbo can't reemerge with other cards.

Whenever another Splorg you control becomes self-aware, you may toggle any or all of its statuses. (*The statuses are tapped/untapped, face up/face down, and unflipped/flipped.*)

Other Splorgs you control have "T, Devolve one level: Target player sacrifices a non-evolved permanent for each spell in his or her group memory."

When CARDNAME is put into a graveyard from play, each Splorg card in Limbo is assigned a new variable evolution path.

If another Splorg you control would molt, it molts tomorrow instead.

Splorgs you control have ideal traits. Splorg missions can't be aborted.

The team liked the idea and chose the "erects two monuments" one. Over time, even sillier words were chosen to reinforce the absurdity of the text—"assemble" and "Contraption."

I think the final card does what it is meant to do quite well—be funny, with just a hint of potential, and not actually be worthless in play. Others, including Mark Rosewater, disagree, citing that people now *expect* us to make Contraptions some day and won't be happy until we do. The card is certainly polarizing and has generated lots and lots of discussion, which is good enough for me. I don't really expect Contraptions to be realized in the game, but I'm sure some enterprising young designer will surprise me some day; in fact, Kenneth Nagle has already put forth a few ways that the game could incorporate the idea in such a way that **Steamflogger Boss** actually makes sense.



I suppose I do shed a tear for the unconnected individuals that open this card and aren't savvy enough to realize how absurd it actually is, and spend their lives questing like the Green Knight for the other *Future Sight* cards that make Contraptions, never realizing they don't exist. Hopefully their friends will clue them in at some point.



Last Week's Poll:

How many people have you taught to play Magic in the past year?

| | | |
|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| 2-3 | 4086 | 32.5% |
| 0 | 3563 | 28.3% |
| 1 | 2891 | 23.0% |
| 4-10 | 1462 | 11.6% |
| More than 10 | 586 | 4.7% |
| Total | 12588 | 100.0% |

The number one way that people learn about the game and how to play the game is from friends, and that has been true since the game debuted. So to those of you that checked "1" or "0", the future health of the game depends on your ability to grow the community! Rope in some new pals!

This Week's Poll:

Is Steamflogger Boss funny enough to have been printed?

Yes, that's a funny card.
 No. It's funny, but not worth wasting a card on.
 No, it isn't funny.

Aaron Forsythe was a professional **Magic** player and Internet columnist prior to leaving Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to join Wizards of the Coast. His first duty here was Content Manager of this very website, a job that required him to do actual work as opposed to playing games all the time. So when a position opened in R&D, he jumped at the chance. He is now director of **Magic** R&D, and still plays **Magic** in his free time when he's not busy playing **Magic**.



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