

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



# Timeshift After Timeshift

Mark Rosewater  
Making Magic  
Monday, April 30, 2007



Welcome to the third and final Timeshift Week. Since I spent the last three columns talking about the overall set design of *Future Sight*, I thought it would be fun today to dig into some stories about the designs of individual cards. And since it's Timeshift Week, I decided to just stick to stories about timeshifted cards. Trust me, the timeshifted cards are where the majority of the wacky stories are.

## Blade of the Sixth Pride

When design handed over the set to development it had one vanilla card:

**Trained Pit Bull**  
1W  
Creature - Hound  
3/1

The first note in the comments field was:

MR (3/20/07): This card will not have a text box. The point of the card is that it's a vanilla 3/1. The 1W cost is just a design guess meaning it has a +/- 2 variance of being correct.

The card came about because I was trying to find different ways to show innovation. I really liked the idea of a few of the future timeshifted cards showing something new not in the text box but in the frame itself. The idea for the full frame goes back to *Unglued*. For many years the **Magic** artist Chris Rush (you might know him from such cards as *Black Lotus* and *Lightning Bolt*) worked at Wizards. During that time he and I got into an interesting conversation about what we could do to improve basic lands. His favorite idea was to make them all art.

I remembered Chris' suggestion when I was trying to come up with cool basic lands for *Unglued*. (I would later push the idea even further on the *Unhinged* basic lands.)

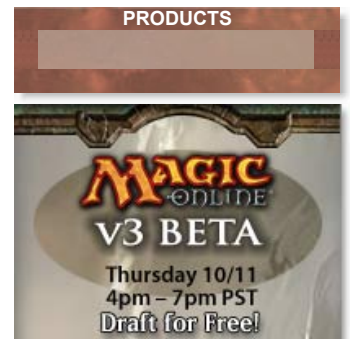


The *Unglued* lands, in turn, inspired Aaron Forysthe who pitched the idea of doing all art spells as promotional cards. This was on my mind as I was looking for new frame innovations when I realized that vanilla creatures didn't need a text box. They would be a perfect place to use full frame art.

So how did we end up with a 1W 3/1? Simple. I decided to see what vanilla power/toughness combinations we've never done and learned, much to my surprise, that 3/1 was on the list. Once that gauntlet had been thrown down, I set out to figure out what color got it. A three mana 3/1 seemed a bit lame so I wanted to see if a two mana 3/1 was possible. This meant that blue, black and red were right out as they didn't get anything close to a 1C 3/1. This left white and green. I went up to the various developers and asked "Can green get a 3/1 for 1G?"

I got various answers. I then asked the same question with white. This time I got more answers in the "yes/maybe/we could test it" category. And so I made it white.

It wasn't until development that the single card got stretched into the five card cycle. Why did this happen? The development team was worried that the set was excessively complicated and they wanted to try and find places



for simple yet innovative things to do. The vanilla full frame creatures sounded cool to them and it was the simplest thing the designers had turned in. A day later the vanilla cycle was born.



### Goldmeadow Lookout

Every year we like to take a few items that we weave throughout the entire block. Spellshapers were one such item for *Time Spiral* block. In *Time Spiral*, the spellshapers all create effects of old cards. In *Planar Chaos*, they create effects of old cards but color shifted into new colors. For *Future Sight*, we knew that we needed spellshapers that did something they've never done before. While tackling this puzzle, the design team came across the idea of spellshapers that made permanents. After a little exploring, it became clear that making tokens of existing creatures would both fill the nostalgia theme and the innovation/future theme.

The next step was for us to figure out what creatures the tokens would be. We wanted creatures that would play nicely with the fact that they would be mass produced as tokens. We came up with multiple interesting options for every color except white. Remember that since this was a common cycle we insisted that the creatures it copied were also common.

We struggled for a while until someone (I don't remember who as I'd identify him if I could) suggested that white create a token not from the past but from the future. We stick the white spellshaper on the timeshited side and then we could make the ideal common white creature that we were hoping to make one day. So Goldmeadow Harrier be patient – your time shall come.

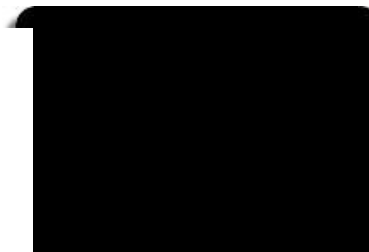


### Lucent Liminid

The original version of this card, the one submitted to development from design was:

```

Astral Elemental
3WW
Creature Enchantment
1/3
Armor 2
All other creatures you control have armor 2.
    
```



Armor ended up being called absorb and it appears on **Lymph Sliver**. I always knew we wanted an enchantment creature (note that I wrote it originally as creature enchantment – that changed as enchant creatures used to be called creature enchantments and we knew confusion would arise). My design was to create an enchantment and then just add a body to the enchantment.

What happened? As I explained above, one of the things that development constantly struggled over was finding ways to simplify the timeshifted cards. Finding ways to be innovative and simple are quite hard. As I said, this is the major reasoning behind cycling in the full frame vanilla creatures. The development team thought that having a creature that also is an enchantment was enough innovation that it didn't need anything more.

Personally, I wish they had kept some static ability on it because then the card would feel more like an enchantment. That said, I do think players will find some interesting uses for this card.

### Bonded Fetch

For a long time I've believed we that underuse creature keywords. This is something that I had always planned on addressing as Head Designer. As I knew what I was planning, I used **Future Sight** to outline what I wanted and run it through the rest of R&D. Hints of what we're planning are dropped throughout this set. This topic is big enough that it's going to get its own column. **Bonded Fetch** is one of the ones hinting at how I wanted to use our existing keywords in new and interesting ways. Haste, in particular, I felt deserved to be used in more colors than just red and in more ways than just aggression.

One last little factoid about this card. **Bonded Fetch** ended up being printed exactly as design turned it in even down to the mana cost. Development made only one change. What was it? They added defender.



### Spellweaver Volute

I believe this and **Bridge from Below** were the last two timeshifted cards to be designed. They were created during a time in mid to late development that we call "hole filling". Basically what happens is that development wrestles with the card list for a while, constantly fiddling and making upgrades. Along the way cards fall out, usually for being either too good or too bad. When this happens, the lead developer sends out a list of holes to some subset of available designers. Each hole comes with a description of what parameters the design has to fit. The designers are then given a deadline and the development team selects from the submitted cards to fill the holes.

**Future Sight** development generated more holes than an average expansion, almost all of them from the timeshifted half of the set. Why so many? Because the timeshifted cards by their nature tended to be rule breaking cards and rule breaking cards are the ones most often to cause problems. (I've mentioned this before but I find it funny so I'll bring it up again – Mark Gottlieb, Rules Manager, had to kill numerous cards created by Mark Gottlieb, **Future Sight** designer.)

While I normally try to do as much hole filling as I can, I felt a particular obligation to **Future Sight** because the parameters for the timeshifted cards was much harsher than normal. Anyway, one day Mike Turian, the development lead for the set, sends me an email telling me he has two holes, one blue, one black, both in rare, both timeshifted. I sent him back exactly two cards that day, one for each hole, and surprisingly both wound up in the set. The chances of such a thing happening, turning in just two cards at one time that both get accepted is quite rare so I was excited by the feat.

The first card was the following blue rare:

```
Build-It
3UU
Enchantment - Aura
Enchant Instant or Sorcery Card in Any Graveyard
Whenever you play a blue creature, it gains "when this creature comes
into play, play a copy of the enchanted instant or sorcery."
```



The second was a black rare and I'll get to that in the next section. So how did this card come about? Well, one of the tricks I was using to make timeshifted cards was to think of a basic part of the game and then think of things that we hadn't done with that element of the game yet. At some point I started playing around with auras. What hadn't we enchanted yet? We'd done creatures and lands and artifacts and enchantments. What was left? Instants and sorceries. But how could you enchant an instant or sorcery?

Then it hit me. What if you enchanted them while they were just cards. This meant that I had to enchant them in some zone. In play was out as instants and sorceries don't end up in play (...yet. This is a running joke with me and Gottlieb. Whenever he says that we don't do something, I always allow a beat and add "...yet.") This left the library, hand and graveyard. (Okay and remove from the game – I just have a personal grudge against things that work with cards *removed from the game* – man that zone needs a new name.) The library had all sorts of problems. The hand likewise had issues with the fact that the cards are hidden. The graveyard though seemed perfect. The cards are public information and they just sit there. The only problem was that I know the card Animate Dead has caused endless headaches and it originally enchanted a "dead" creature.

Even though I knew the idea was probably going to get killed, it tickled some part of my design instinct. So I swung my chair around (to understand this story I have to let you in on a little factoid. Gottlieb and I sit next to each other – something about keeping your friends close and your enemies closer) and said to Gottlieb, "You have any problem if I enchant instants or sorceries in the graveyard?"

He replied, "In the graveyard? No. That's fine."

I literally did a double take. (My second favorite take in comedy, by the way, after the spit take.) Gottlieb never tells me I can do the real crazy stuff. The best I usually get is a little chuckle and a "we'll see"; and most often I get a stifled laugh with "no way".

So I acted like any kid does when Mom says you can do something that you're pretty sure she didn't understand you correctly. I acted on it immediately. I knew if the card wasn't made in the next ten minutes it might never see the light of day. Okay, why would you want to enchant an instant or sorcery in the graveyard? Because you want to use them in some way. From that I got to the idea that the enchantment allows you to add comes into play effects onto your blue creatures. This led to the card above.

The astute reader might realize that Build-It and *Spellweaver Volute* aren't exactly the same card. What happened? Playtesting. R&D playteter Steve Warner built an insane deck around the card. So insane that many of the developers thought it was best to just kill the card. No no, I said, let me fix it.

So I limited the card to just effecting instants and then made the trigger sorcery spells. This created tension as it forced the deck to have both instants and sorceries in it, each of which only worked with half of the combo. I moved away from creatures because they proved too good, partly because creatures are just good on their own and partly because it's a lot easier to get creatures back to your hand to play again and again. Next I was forced to make the effect remove the instant when it made a copy. This was done to keep the card from redoing the same effect again and again. We call this "repetition of play" (that is, it forces the game to keep doing the same thing, making it less varied and more boring) and it's something we try hard to avoid in most circumstances.

I'm quite happy with how the card ended up as it both kept the quirky flavor I wanted and had interesting build-around-me possibilities.

### Bridge From Below

Now we come to the black rare I talked about above. Here's what I turned in during my hole filling submission:

#### **Dawn of the Dead**

BBB

Enchantment

CARDNAME only works if it is in a graveyard.

If you ever sacrifice a creature, remove CARDNAME from the game.

Whenever a creature you control would be put into a graveyard from play, instead remove it from the game and put two 1/1 black zombie creature tokens into play.

This card came about because I was trying to come up with cards that did something we hadn't done before. For some reason I stumbled upon the idea of a card that only worked in the graveyard. I quickly realized that it made the most sense as an enchantment. This led me to examine why an enchantment would only work in a graveyard. The answer I came up with was flavor. What if the enchantment somehow interacted with the graveyard?

Now I've always been a fan of zombies (Check out my column "[I cc: Dead People](#)" for more on this.) and the more I thought about a flavorful way to make an enchantment working in the graveyard make sense, the more I thought about zombies overrunning the game. What if the enchantment triggered every time something died? And what if that trigger made some zombies? It then tickled my funny bone to have the zombie tokens create more tokens when they died. The idea would be that this enchantment with time would just flood the board with zombies.

While this was horribly flavorful, development discovered that an endless faucet of zombies that could only be stopped with graveyard removal seemed a little brutal. They fixed this with a few changes. First they added the "nontoken" clause to keep the zombies from begetting more zombies all by themselves. Second they turned the



two 1/1 tokens into a single 2/2 token. Finally, they added a clause to the card that gave the opponent some way to get rid of the enchantment with cards that might actually be in their deck. Sure it might make them kill their own creatures but hey zombie hordes can make you do strange things. (Quick plug – a great zombie themed comic book by Robert Kirkman, one of my favorite comic writers, is called Walking Dead and it's about a group of people living in a zombie infested world – Kirkman also wrote Marvel Zombies set in an alternate dimension where all of the Marvel heroes become zombies; fun but not quite as strong as Walking Dead. I'd check it out if zombie-infested worlds sound cool to you.)

I feel like the published version of the card captured all the flavor I was shooting for without the overpowered nuttiness of my submitted card.

### Death Rattle

This was the first delve card created. It's interesting to note that during *The Great Designer Search*, Noah Weil, current development intern, created a mechanic called pyre which is basically a slightly rougher version of delve. (*Future Sight* design was turned over in May; *GDS* started in October.) I was quite impressed because he had independently created a mechanic that we really liked. Note that in the feedback, all the judges say nice things about pyre and several of my notes are how to turn the mechanic into delve, which I feel is the right execution for pyre.



### Frenzy Sliver

One of the fun parts of this set was that it allowed us to dip into the well of keywords we'd designed over the years that fell to the wayside in whatever set they were created in. Frenzy, for instance, was a creature combat mechanic designed by Richard Garfield for *Odyssey*. The design had too many components and when it was whittled down, frenzy was removed as it didn't play into the graveyard theme of the set.

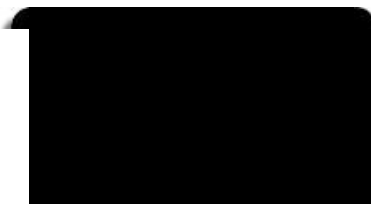
I've seen some players comment that this mechanic felt neither new (Musk Dwellers has this ability) nor innovative. My answer is twofold. First, we often find abilities that appeared on old cards and turn them into keywords. (Chub Toad meet Bushido.) Second, of all the veins of **Magic** design, one of the ones we've tapped the deepest is creature combat mechanics. Finding simple mechanics that both have neat interactions and play well are few and far between.

While I don't think frenzy is going to wow anyone if and when it ever shows up *en masse*, it is the kind of mechanic that will add a lot to creature interaction in Limited. It's the kind of thing we add not because it raises the splash value of the set but rather because it just makes it play better.



### Korlash, Heir to Blackblade

When we toyed around with the idea of the future set, we came up with the concept of having legends that were offspring of current and past legends. The problem was how to make these cards timeshifted. The answer came from Bill Rose, the current VP of R&D and former Head Designer/Developer. Bill was trying to come up with a way to make future copies of legends mean something and stumbled upon grandeur. By adding grandeur to this cycle it allowed us to move them to the timeshifted side of the design.





### Snake Cult Initiation

This card was turned in from design exactly as it was printed. The only two changes were that the playtest name was Poisoned Fangs and the keyword was called venom (more on this in a moment). In the initial design, this card and Poisoned City (a white/blue dual land that gave you a poison counter when you tapped it – Aaron let the cat out of the bag about this card in his column, "[When a Cycle Isn't a Cycle](#)" where he also explains [why development killed it](#)) were the only two cards to reference poison. [Virulent Sliver](#) would come in development when the sliver cycle (common slivers that each share a new keyword with its brethren) was added.

For years I've been talking about how I plan to bring back poison. Since *Future Sight* was all about hinting at what **Magic** has planned, it was obvious that poison had to be included. I knew when I brought poison back (yes when – poison is *not* a red herring) that I wanted to keyword the "grants poison" ability. Quick aside – a number of players are mad that poisonous specifies "combat damage" since so many poison decks make use of **Psionic Gift**-type interactions to deliver the poison. My response is that the **Psionic Gift**-type tricks were only necessary because poison is so bad. When poison returns, trust me, its power level will be closer to [Virulent Sliver](#) than [Crypt Cobra](#).



So how did we get from venom to poisonous for the keyword's name? I knew that poison already had a meaning so we had to choose a different word. I chose venom as it was the closest noun I could find that meant poison. When the creative team got their hand on the mechanic, they chose to name it poison. It was then pointed out to them by my nemesis Mark Gottlieb (aka the Rules Manager) that **Magic** doesn't like when one word means two things ("play" and "counter" I'm looking at you). The creative team then came up with poisonous.

It was pointed out to them that "poisonous" had two issues. One, it's an adjective and keywords for creature abilities tend to like being nouns. And two, technically, being "poisonous" means that it will poison someone who eats the item in question. Being poisonous if it bites you is the word "venomous". Thus, a snake is venomous if its bite will poison you and poisonous if eating the snake will poison you. The creative team understood both objections but felt that the tie to poison was important and thus kept the word poisonous. What this means is that the next time you find your creatures getting into combat with a poisonous creature, instruct them not to eat the other creature.

### Ghostfire





This little gem was created by Aaron Forsythe during development and did an excellent job of finding the intersection between innovative and simple. The only debate this card caused was debating what color the frame was supposed to be and even that fight started and ended in the same meeting.

### Grinning Ignus



This card started as I was trying to find a storm enabler (because storm really needs the help) that was wacky enough to feel like a timeshifted card. I remember when I made the card I started showing it around asking people opinions, the most common of which I received was "That's a weird card, Mark."

### Steamflogger Boss

Let me go on the record: I hate this card. Hate, hate, hate it! I tried to have it killed at every possible turn. Why? Because I wasn't a fan of rules text that when the set came out would be completely useless. (I do feel obligated to point out that if this card had the second line deleted I think it would be seen in a positive light. It's a Hill Giant that makes other Hill Giants better.) Yes, Tarmogoyf mentions a card type that doesn't currently exist but that's in reminder text. It doesn't have any actual impact on how the card plays.

But the card was the favorite of numerous R&D members, Devin Low in particular. Devin and I used to argue about this card. Devin's argument, which obviously swayed enough of R&D to get the card to print, was that the card really evoked strong feelings. Many hated it while another larger group loved it. Cards like that are great to print as they get the audience invested.

So what exactly are contraptions and how do you assemble them? That's a topic for a different column. Unfortunately, I cannot even tell you when such a column might (or might not) be written.

### Muraganda Petroglyphs





This is one of those designs that's been floating around forever (it was turned in both during *You Make the Card* and *The Great Designer Search*). My favorite story about this card is that it was one of the ways in *Future Sight* to play *Force of Savagery* until Force was improved by being given trample.

### Quagnoth

Here's the card turned in from design:

#### **Boss Scragnoth**

5G

Creature - Beast

4/4

While in your hand, CARDNAME cannot be discarded. If you would discard it, reveal the card to all players.

CARDNAME cannot be countered.

CARDNAME cannot be the target of spells and abilities in play and in the graveyard.

This is one of those cards where development did their best to keep the original intent of the card, which was a new and improved *Scragnoth*. (I was really proud of the card's playtest name, by the way.) The "cannot be countered" was turned into split second which both accomplished the same task and tied it in tighter to the block. The "cannot be the target of spells or abilities" was turned into the new keyword, shroud. The anti-discard text basically stood but with slightly different templating. The only thing lost was its ability to not be targeted in the graveyard and for giving that up it gained an extra toughness. A pretty good trade.



### Spellwild Ouphe

One of the great things about having the Rules Manager as a design team member is that he'd find little sections of the rules we could exploit they weren't being exploited currently. This card is one such creation. Gottlieb turned this card in during his first pass and the card made it all the way to print. That's usually a sign that the designer did something right.





## Tarmogoyf

What's a planeswalker? Apparently a new card type if I read the reminder text correctly. But there's no planeswalker card type in the rules. What gives? Um, answer fuzzy, check back later.



## River of Tears

From time to time, design will put together little teams to work on areas of future design. Not things currently being worked on but rather areas that we know we will need work on in the future. A common theme for a group like this is lands. Why lands? Because we know we're going to keep needing them and nonbasic land designs are starting to become harder and harder to find.

One such group spent a month (many years ago) hammering out all the ideas they could come up with for dual lands. I remember when I looked through them that most of the designs seemed very straight forward. Surely, I argued, there must be some way to design dual lands that is different from how they've been designed before.

For some reason the way my mind functions is that when I get some challenge I can't answer it wriggles into my brain and won't leave until it finds what it wants. Often this can take weeks, months, or sometimes even years. Anyway, my mind had set out to find a new way to approach dual lands. In the middle of a shower years later (for some reason many of my best ideas come while I'm showering), I hit upon the solution. What if the restriction wasn't on the land itself but in how you could get the different colors of mana? The land would come into play without any restrictions and would tap without any extra cost. The challenge to the card would come with how you got each color of mana.



With this idea in mind, I came up with the cycle that **River of Tears** belongs to. Very proud, I showed it to the rest of R&D. The result was I got a lot of strange looks. That's an interesting cycle, they said, maybe too interesting. Whenever we needed a dual land cycle, I would pitch **River of Tears** and friends, and always something else was found to fill the slots.

Flash forward to *Future Sight* and my crazy "cycle of cycles" dual land idea. Since this cycle was showing off the different kind of things we could do with dual lands and the set was proving to have a "try-out new ideas" feel, *River of Tears* was a perfect fit. The big question remaining is: what will the world think of it? If any of you have played it, I'm dying for feedback on what you did or didn't like about it.

### Zoetic Cavern

When it was turned in from design, this card had the honor of being part of two different cycles. First, it was part of the non-timeshifted lands with keywords cycle (it tapped for blue and came into play tapped back then). Second, it was part of a vertical cycle of non-creature cards with morph. Common had an enchantment, uncommon a land and rare a non-creature artifact. The development team felt odd having the card cross two cycles so they changed it to produce colorless mana and made a replacement for the land cycle.



## Future Shock

That's all I got for today. I hope the peek into some of the specific card issues was insightful. If you have any questions about any other *Future Sight* cards write in and I'll see if I can find a place to address the ones that I think have interesting answers.

Join me next week when I finally introduce you to Melvin.

Until then, may you have fun playing in the FUTURE (dramatic music).

Mark Rosewater

*Mark Rosewater is Head **Magic** Designer. What this fancy title means is that he's in charge of **Magic** design. This gets him a lot of mail (which he actually reads). When not alternatively destroying and saving **Magic**, he likes to spend time with his family, do stereotypically geeky things (play games, read comics, watch a lot of science fiction, etc.) and write about himself in third person.*



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Mark Rosewater](#) archive

---

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Inside Wizards](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#) | [Sitemap](#)

© 1995-2007 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

