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THE NEW OLD SCHOOL

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I used to love watching professional basketball. Growing up in Massachusetts, it was easy to root for the Boston Celtics during the heady days of the 1980s. The year we brought on Bill Walton to pitch in 20-25 minutes per game in relief of Robert Parrish was one of the best years of my life. I watched Kevin McHale's playing style, since he had long, loping arms and little speed, which I identified with, and I tried his moves on the playground. And of course, there was Larry Legend. (I'm noting the opportunity to segue early into **Magic** here, and passing on it. Don't sweat it; the nasty, fast-breaking shadow creatures are coming. I call them the Los Angeles Lakers.)

The Celtics-Lakers rivalry back then was fun (for those of us close enough to a relevant city), but many basketball purists didn't like it. The ones I heard from most often were crazy-insane Celtics fans over 30. They said the Lakers' fast-break game was an affront to the sport, a sign of the decline of professional basketball. These folks didn't like dunks, didn't like showy plays, and so on. Back in their day, basketball was a game of X's and O's, the pick and roll, the open jump shot. That was "old school."

When Michael Jordan came into his own during the early 90s and elevated professional basketball to a whole new level, people gradually forgot about the intensity of the Larry Bird-Magic Johnson rivalry, and whether fast breaks were better than half-court offenses or not. Over the course of several championships, the Chicago Bulls' dominance and Jordan's style of play made everything that came before "old school." You can bet that five to ten years from now (this season is supposed to be Jordan's last), *his* game will be considered old school. We've already heard the rumblings for years – there's no one like him, never will, all these newer, younger players are too selfish, and so on.

So what does this have to do with **Magic** – and *Tempest*, in particular?

THE MIDDLE AGE OF MAGIC

Funny thing about time – it turns new things into old things. As basketball teams, presidencies, music trends, and a million other things come and go, there's always a group of people who attach themselves to a familiar past. **Magic** expansions are no different, in our tiny corner of the universe. There are people who think *Ice Age* is old school, and people who remember *The Dark* and laugh at them. In turn, people who can tell stories of rubbing shoulders with Richard Garfield up and down the Pacific Coast in the formative Alpha days can smile at everyone else. No doubt, Richard's mother can one-up us all with memories of how little Ricky used to pretend to be a dragon when he was three years old. (If you say, "See, Mom?" really fast with a toddler's lisp, you get "Shivan." Thus a legendary card was born.)

Tempest is about the midpoint in **Magic**'s history – there are roughly as many expansions before its release as there have been since. It's in a sort of middle age, where many men buy a fancy-pants car to compensate for the fact that they're balding. But in the **Magic** world, being a middle-aged expansion is *good*. You can brag about how you've impacted the Extended environment as the older fogies move on. Veteran players remember you fondly, and newer players discover your mechanics with awe.

So it is with *Tempest* now. Elsewhere, other writers may deal with the impact of *Mirage*'s rotation on Extended, but for casual players, *Tempest* represents quite a landmark. While I didn't rank it in the "top casual expansions" in a previous [article](#), it came mighty close, for a variety of reasons:

- Buyback is one of the mechanics best loved by players of all stripes. From [Searing Touch](#) silliness to [Capsize](#) craziness, the possibilities of playing and replaying a spell until you run out of mana are the stuff of imagination.
- Slivers continue to rate highly as a player favorite, years after we saw the last known specimen. (Don't try to read any foreshadowing into that; I don't know any more than you do.)
- Shadow is an intriguing "ultra-flyer" ability that poses a strategic dilemma in multiplayer: you will get through most defenses, but you will stop very little in return. ([Phyrexian Splicer](#) is an excellent answer to this dilemma...now all you have to do is survive mass removal!)



If you love speculation, consider this: with the return of cycling an immediate success, how long can R&D resist putting off the return of buyback, which may be even more popular? And we've all seen the tantalizing artwork on [Riptide Replicator](#) – sure, my colleagues in the belly of the beast have to maintain "no comment" on the next couple of expansions, but since you and I have no clue what's coming next in *Legions*, isn't it fun to think of what that might mean? And as for shadow – eh, never mind, they said they'd never do it. But the door has been left ajar for both buyback and Slivers, and if either returns, kitchen tables around the world will see a boomlet of *Tempest* cards, for the same reason that more casual players are revisiting [Drifting Meadow](#) with [Astral Slide](#) around. At that point, *Tempest* will be old school, whether the current crop of students in that school want it there or not.

While we ponder all of this, here are ten fairly obscure cards from *Tempest* that your playgroup ought to try, if it hasn't already. (I favored rares since it's less likely newer players will have heard of them. Rarity is not a precondition of quality. See: [Bottle Gnomes](#).)

[Altar of Dementia](#) – Not obscure at all to seasoned players, this artifact is an excellent way of disposing of stolen creatures, temporary tokens, creatures you're about to lose to [Corpse Dance](#) or [Sneak Attack](#), and so on. If you like milling at all, find four.

[Deadshot](#) – Red doesn't do clever very often, but this can be clever. It's a nice way to deal a great deal more damage than four mana can manage (on a [Lhurgoyf](#) or [Mortivore](#), this looks particularly nice).

[Extinction](#) – Perhaps the best-known card of those I've chosen, it's still worth mention in the age of *Onslaught*. Your group either has to embrace this card or ban it. Discuss ahead of time to avoid bad feelings.

Helm of Possession – Lose a creature, get a creature. A fine signal to send in multiplayer. Lovely in conjunction with stuff like [Weatherseed Treefolk](#) or [Undead Gladiator](#).

Magnetic Web – This takes some getting used to, but you can do marvelous things with this over time, if the board lets you. In team (possibly from an "emperor" position where you're supporting your teammates), this can wreak havoc on the opposition.

No Quarter – Please note that the ability checks the power and toughness of the creatures in question at the very moment the blocks take place. So you can't wait for a block, and *then* sink a creature so that [No Quarter](#) applies. That said, it's a fine warning, and an easy card to get creative with. See: [Belbe's Armor](#), [Flowstone Armor](#), and [Vhati il-Dal](#) (also below).

Spirit Mirror – Don't underestimate the value of having a continual 2/2 on the board. Add to that the ability to create a creature every upkeep, and destroy one any time before that, and you've got some interesting play ideas. Consider [Artificial Evolution](#) and [Wirewood Savage](#). (The Evolution can target either the Savage to change "Beast" to "Reflection," or the Mirror to change "Reflection" to "Beast." Either way, you're drawing two cards a turn. If Beast decks are big in your group, though, take the second option and own the red-green mages!)

Starke of Rath – The classic "can I break the symmetry?" card. Protective white cards such as [Fountain Watch](#) or [Spiritual Asylum](#) may help. Also, consider "sleeper" creatures from *Urza's* block. Or you can just wind Starke up and let him go where he will.

Vhati il-Dal – Excellent insurance against a really large creature with haste. Never attack with him.

Winds of Rath – Of all the variants on [Wrath of God](#), this is the only one to gain power with the recent improvement of creature enchantments. I suppose that's saying something, though I'm not sure what. [Iridescent Drake](#) and [Nomad Mythmaker](#) are fine companions to this sweeper.

THERE IS NO OLD SCHOOL, ONLY OLD PLAYERS

Already, there is a significant minority of the **Magic** player population to whom the list above is completely new. Over time, it will probably increase to a majority. I've already heard a reader or two refer to *Urza's* block as "old school"! The more successful **Magic** becomes, the more wings the old school will get, until it approaches the size and complexity of a university campus.

No need for the more grizzled veterans among us to feel threatened – and some will be, since "old school" is a badge that makes us feel different, or perhaps better. But put your reservations aside – after all, more players who feel they've been around long enough to be fully invested in the game is a *good* thing. That means more companions who care about the same issues you care about, who speak about "glory days" and "golden ages" (whenever those may be) in the same breathless tones as you, and who want to see things like appropriate reprints, recasts of old mechanics, and nods to what has made the game classic.

So whoever you are, embrace the New Old School! Whether yours is Alpha, *Urza's Saga*, or *Judgment*, the interesting cards and strategic challenges within *Tempest* tell a common story: we're all in the same school; some of us are just older than everyone else.

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