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Root for the Funky Fish

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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

When the changes to the Extended format were announced, I wrote an [article](#) brainstorming some fun deck ideas in what was then a completely uncharted format. At the time, I only had enough space to feature four cards from the entire *Tempest* block, so I ended the article with a list of other kooky potential feature cards.

Two of the cards from that list -- **Rootwater Matriarch** and **Rootwater Shaman** -- have continued to tickle my brain. I knew that when we decided to do a *Tempest* Week here at MagicTheGathering.com, I would jump at the chance to focus on these two quirky beauties.



First, though, because it's *Tempest* Week, I'll let you in on why *Tempest* holds a special place in my heart. Put simply, I played my first competitive **Magic** tournament soon after *Tempest* became legal in Standard. I had been playing since *Ice Age*, but it took me a while to go from theme-deck building with my wife to facing off against the pro players in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

I can still remember showing up at The Underworld with my black-blue Sliver deck. That's right. Black. Blue. Slivers. None of those **Muscle** wimps for me (heck, this was even pre-**Hibernation Sliver**). Instead, I was somehow attracted to the combination of **Winged Sliver**, **Mindwhip Sliver**, and **Metallic Sliver**. I predictably ended the day 1-3, but I had loads of fun. I don't play in many competitive tournaments, but that first one was memorable.

Someday I'll talk about my *second* Constructed tournament, where I battled Randy Buehler with my red-black **Vampire Hounds** - **Revenant** deck. Maybe when we do *Stronghold* Week.

Anyway, somehow amid the *Tempest* set's focus on Slivers, shadow creatures, and quick kills, I completely overlooked **Rootwater Matriarch** and Shaman. In fact, I never built a deck around them while they were legal in Standard. Today feels a bit like making up for lost time.

Rootwater Shaman

As [Aaron](#) so recently reminded us, creatures with nontapping and nonmana abilities are a tremendous luxury. **Rootwater Shaman** is a bit like **True Believer**, **Meddling Mage**, or **Nightscape Familiar** in its effect. That is, the rules of the game change in your favor as long as these creatures are alive -- they're sort of like enchantments on little cardboard legs. Add to the fact that **Rootwater Shaman** isn't a horrible deal as a 2/2 for 2, and you have a very intriguing medicine man.

The ability to play creature enchantments at instant speed might not curl your toes at first. But think about the implications. You can play **Rancor** on whichever creature it will most help after blockers are declared. **Abduction** nabs an opposing creature as surprise defense. **Ghostly Wings** becomes an emergency creature-pumping-flying-**Unsummon** whenever needed. The list goes on and on. **Pariah** and **Pattern of Rebirth**, in particular, have evil implications when played as instants.

Probably the most impressive effect you'll find with the ability to play creature enchantments as instants is that **Rootwater Shaman** makes a typical **Enchantress deck** even wackier. Sure, the deck needs to support a lot of enchant creature cards instead of more global enchantments, but a **Whip Silk** played several times for



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several cards during an opponent's end step sounds pretty tasty to me . . .

Enchant-A-Thon		
Extended-Legal Rootwater Shaman Deck		
Main Deck 60 cards		
12 Forest	4 Argothian Enchantress	1 Ancestral Mask
4 Island	4 Birds of Paradise	4 Elephant Guide
4 Yavimaya Coast	4 Rootwater Shaman	4 Enchantress's Presence
20 lands	4 Verduran Enchantress	2 Pattern of Rebirth
	4 Wall of Blossoms	4 Rancor
	4 Whirlpool Rider	1 Whip Silk
	24 creatures	16 other spells

Rootwater Matriarch

Meanwhile, the Matriarch of the Rootwater clan has a different love for creature enchantments. With a flick of the wrist (or a tap . . . whatever), **Rootwater Matriarch** can steal a creature as long as it's enchanted. The enchantment doesn't need to be your own. You can steal your opponent's **Steadfast Guard** after it's been suited up with a **Serra's Embrace**, or you can drop **Curiosity** on the Guard yourself to steal it. Either way, the creature is coming over to your side of the table for the foreseeable future. Note that **Rootwater Matriarch** doesn't need to stay tapped for the effect -- each turn it can steal a newly enchanted creature.

Of course, the ability presents a dilemma: Do you risk playing good creature enchantments on opposing creatures so you can steal them, or do you play with crippling enchantments like **Mourning** and steal a diminished creature? Having your opponent **Parch** your Matriarch in response to dropping **Armadillo Cloak** on his or her creature would suck, but a stolen **Masticore** with **Arrest** on it is no good either. Some creature enchantments ride a middle ground nicely -- the aforementioned **Pariah** and even something as seemingly innocent as **Private Research** can be the Matriarch's best friend.

Personally, I think **Tempest** provides another solution to **Rootwater Matriarch** in the Licids. With **Gliding Lcid**, for example, you have a creature that can combine with the Matriarch to steal any opposing creature *and* give it flying. When the creature is about to die -- or if a better creature to steal comes along -- the Lcid can always hop off and aim at another opposing brute. Something like this . . .



The Bunny Hop		
Extended-Legal Rootwater Matriarch Deck		
Main Deck 60 cards		
15 Island	2 Dominating Lcid	4 Boomerang
4 Lonely Sandbar	4 Gliding Lcid	3 Curiosity
4 Wasteland	4 Manakin	2 Private Research
23 lands	4 Metathran Elite	3 Sky Diamond
	2 Rayne, Academy Chancellor	12 other spells
	4 Rootwater Matriarch	
	1 Thran Golem	
	4 Transmogriying Lcid	
	25 creatures	

Unfortunately, **Rootwater Matriarch** fits relatively poorly into a modified Enchantress deck, and **Rootwater Shaman** doesn't help at all when using Lcids. As both are blue and center around using creature enchantments, though, it stands to reason that several decks can support both members of the Rootwater clan.

For example, both creatures are Merfolk. Merfolk decks have long used creature enchantments like **Curiosity** and **Sigil of Sleep** in them, so a Merfolk deck is a natural place to find both the Shaman and Matriarch. In particular, I like the use of **Mistform Mask** in a deck like this -- you can steal opposing creatures at instant speed and then turn them into Merfolk for +1/+1 and islandwalk thanks to **Lord of Atlantis**. The ability to turn the Lord itself into a Merfolk to benefit from its own ability is an added bonus.

Funky Fish		
Extended-Legal Rootwater Merfolk Deck		
Main Deck 60 cards		

Main Deck 60 cards		
3 Crosis's Catacombs	4 Lord of Atlantis	4 Curiosity
15 Island	4 Manta Riders	4 Fire/Ice
4 Shivan Reef	4 Reef Shaman	4 Mistform Mask
22 lands	4 Rootwater Shaman	2 Quicksilver Dagger
	2 Rootwater Matriarch	14 other spells
	4 Vodalian Merchant	
	2 Whirlpool Warrior	
	24 creatures	

If a deck is going to be focusing on creature enchantments to support both **Rootwater Shaman** and **Rootwater Matriarch**, white provides a few juicy cards to help out. I've sung the praises of **Nomad Mythmaker** before, and to me, a deck with an enchant creature focus feels incomplete without it. Add **Faith Healer** to the mix, and you have almost exactly one bazillion combat tricks you can perform to bewilder and amaze opponents. And because your deck is blue-white, you get to use **Hanna, Ship's Navigator!** Wheee!

Main Deck 60 cards		
4 Adarkar Wastes	2 Auramancer	2 Fact or Fiction
4 Coastal Tower	4 Faith Healer	4 Improvised Armor
5 Island	1 Hanna, Ship's Navigator	4 Pariah
10 Plains	4 Nomad Mythmaker	4 Seal of Cleansing
1 Skycloud Expanse	1 Rayne, Academy Chancellor	4 Wings of Hope
24 lands	2 Rootwater Matriarch	18 other spells
	4 Rootwater Shaman	
	18 creatures	

Are there other decks that can support both **Rootwater Shaman** and **Rootwater Matriarch**? Yes indeedy. Try a blue-green deck with cards like **Merfolk Looter**, **Careful Study**, **Iridescent Drake**, and (insert sounds of heavy footsteps here) **Mythic Proportions!** Or build a deck around **Winds of Rath**. Or use cards like **Dying Wail**, **Gaseous Form**, **Laccolith Rig**, **Treacherous Link**, and **Druid's Call** -- cards that are hard to justify in most decks but that can become a hilarious and rude surprise for an opponent thanks to the **Rootwater Duo**. And **Magic** is fundamentally about hilarious and rude surprises, right?

Both the Shaman and the Matriarch are great examples of cards that can go overlooked in a set for a long while. As I said, I completely missed both of them until recently, and I'm someone who usually stretches the boundaries of viable cards for my decks. I'm confident that every set contains cards like this -- cards that'll blow your friends' minds -- if you use some creativity. Be daring, and explore the (hoo boy . . . bad pun coming) waters of your imagination.

Next week: Enjoy the holidays. Spend time with loved ones.

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