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Overseer, Overboard

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Latest Developments
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"The Tempest set includes what I think is the worst **Magic** mechanic ever: shadow."
--Randy Buehler, "Out of the Shadows," magicthegathering.com, December 20, 2002

Let's review what shadow cards—specifically the cards printed with the mechanic in *Tempest* block—have going against them in R&D terms:

- They remove interactivity by taking blocking out of the game.
- They makes the game too fast because shadow was costed as if it were *neutral* or a *drawback*, when in actuality the ability is very much a positive most of the time.
- The above two points make expensive creatures less attractive, as they are both too slow and can't do what they're really good at: block.
- Most of the really good shadow creatures—**Dauthi Slayer**, **Soltari Priest**, etc.—promote one-color decks, as they have color-intensive mana costs.

That is a lot of negatives. Too many, for sure, for us to want to bring a mechanic back. I know—I [tried](#) during *Betrayers of Kamigawa* design and development. At the time, we were looking for a "ninja" mechanic, and shadow seemed like the perfect mix between mechanics and creative. Ninjas were sneaky, avoided fights, and caused all sorts of havoc, and having shadow creatures with saboteur abilities seemed like a nice execution of those elements. But alas, the people involved weren't into the idea, and the mechanic was shelved again—and it felt permanent.



Fast forward to *Time Spiral* design. The following things were true:

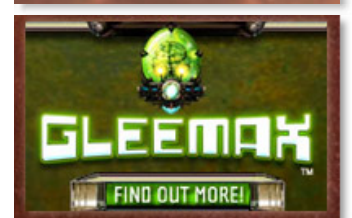
- The set's lead designer, Brian Tinsman, is a maverick, and isn't particularly concerned with how development feels about abilities or other issues. He just wants to make cool cards.
- The theme of the set—nostalgia—was almost an open license to break every rule in the book, all in the name of recreating pockets of the game's past.
- The other members of the team—myself, Mark Rosewater, and Devin Low—had no problem going along with all the mischief that points one and two above led to, preferring to let development sort it all out.

We did show some restraint when choosing which mechanics to bring back in *Time Spiral*. We didn't choose anything that didn't appear "pre-card-face-change," meaning no mechanics from *Mirrodin* forward (including equipment). We didn't choose anything that couldn't have reminder text written for it, which spelled doom for banding and phasing. And we deliberately left out mechanics that stepped on the toes of our newer offerings. If you've played around on the Orb of Insight, you probably have a good idea of what's coming back and what isn't. And if one of your favorite old mechanics isn't there—well, all I can say is this block has two more sets in it.

All this means that, despite Randy's best efforts to stop us, shadow is coming back. Most of the cards have similar qualities to the shadow creatures of yore—cheap costs, low stats, and some saboteur abilities. You'll have to trust us that we did a better job of balancing them this time—many of them are still Constructed quality, but we have better ways to interact with them. We tried to preserve the feeling of shadow, but not make their presence so oppressive such that interactivity goes away.

So shadow's back. Like I said, we like to break our own rules. And then there are the times when we like to break not only the rules that we all kinda knew we were going to break, but also the rules that we all kinda silently agreed that we'd never break. Like making a giant ridiculous creature that is all but impossible to stop.

If you're going to take away interactivity, do it right...





Yep, you read that right. Shadow *and* flying. How many creatures in the history of **Magic** have the ability to block this fellow straight up? I believe the answer is none, not even **Mistform Ultimus**, and that guy can do everything.

On top of that, he can pump up his own power—as well as any shadowy minions he may have—or shrink all the creatures foolish enough *not* to have shadow. Talk about a race-winner!

The overseer may be the next coming of Kokusho, at least in one-on-one play. He has the same stats for the same amount of mana, is far harder to block, and can keep you alive by neutralizing your opponent's creatures. In any event, he's a house in any format where he comes into play.

If shadow returning was a surprise to you, I'm sure a 5/5 flying shadow was even more of a surprise. And the best part is that this set is *chock full* of other cards just like that—cards that will make you drool, make your head spin... hopefully not at the same time, as that would be some kind of saliva lawn sprinkler, which sounds disgusting. Anyway... the prerelease is on September 23-24th!

Two Weeks Ago's Poll:

Isn't Lotus Bloom awesome??!		
Yes.	6018	60.5%
No	2601	26.1%
What?	1332	13.4%
Total	9951	100.0%

It is, in fact, awesome. And it's the prerelease card for *Time Spiral*!

Mike Turian's Poll:

Which of the following is your favorite burn spell:		
Lightning Bolt	6326	39.1%
Demonfire	1472	9.1%
Urza's Rage	1263	7.8%
Fireblast	1176	7.3%
Char	1146	7.1%
Fireball	1041	6.4%
Hammer of Bogardan	947	5.9%

Shock	815	5.0%
Disintegrate	579	3.6%
Flame Wave	408	2.5%
Volcanic Hammer	367	2.3%
Kindle	268	1.7%
Lava Axe	238	1.5%
Zap	138	0.9%
Total	16184	100.0%

Mike was bored and made this up off the top of his head. My personal favorite? [Magma Jet](#).

This Week's Poll:

Do you read...

Comic books

Graphic novels

Both

Neither

*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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