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# Swimming with the Legends of Time Spiral

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Swimming With Sharks  
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Wizards of the Coast is out of the office for the Thanksgiving holiday, and will return with new articles beginning Monday, November 27. In case you missed it, what follows is the article that ran in this slot last week. Have a great weekend, for our American audience happy Thanksgiving vacation, and we'll see all of you Monday!

Scott Johns, *magicthegathering.com* Content Manager

This is an introductory paragraph. This is the opening salvo where I remind you it is "Legends of Time Spiral Week" and conform that theme to the Constructed - specifically Standard-centric tournament Spike - themes of the Swimming With Sharks column. The paragraph concludes with our moving to the list of Time Spiral and "timeshifted" legends, with the promise of analyzing each for viability in Standard and other Constructed formats.

## Academy Ruins

Academy Ruins has a lot of things going for it. For one, it is almost always better to have a land with a great effect than any other kind of utility card. Just look at powerful upsides on [Boseiju, Who Shelters All](#); [Miren, the Moaning Well](#); and [Contested Cliffs](#). These are great cards because they take a "land" spot in your deck rather than a "spell" position. Lands are great because they tap for mana... or they can set up a powerful effect which typically can't be countered.

Academy Ruins is going to have a big impact across many formats, I predict. At Champs, this card was used to lock up control-on-control long games with everything from [Jester's Cap](#) to [Triskelavus](#). In some sense Academy Ruins is the ultimate weapon. It will grind down a control deck's defenses over time like a [Nightmare Void](#) or can keep you from being decked. It can recoup singularly powerful tools keyed to specific jobs or inflict blunt force trauma via relentless threats. This is a land that will do many different things in many different decks... Look for it to appear as a one-of in most cases because multiple copies will probably not be what you want to see in your opening hand.



## Dralnu, Lich Lord

I don't see Dralnu as a very realistic maindeck card at present because of the existence of cards like, I don't know, [Shock](#), [Seal of Fire](#), [Psionic Blast](#), and a dozen others. [Phyrexian Negator](#) had a similar drawback but could win the game quickly after crippling the opponent's hand, especially removal-poor combo decks. Dralnu is, on the other hand, glacially slow (though he certainly packs a potential upside in a long game). I suppose you can play to [Persecute](#) the opponent and untap and run out Dralnu, but you still have to worry about what he was doing the first several turns, not to mention whatever he topdecks.

Possibly Dralnu can be a powerful sideboard card against decks that don't have a lot of burn. He can certainly net cards and grind out a win over many turns the same way [Academy Ruins](#) can... But at the same converted mana cost, Dralnu just seems much slower than [Tidings](#) and worse in general than fast spells like [Careful Consideration](#).

## Endrek Sahr, Master Breeder

I didn't initially think that Endrek Sahr would be very good in Constructed, but he is actually pretty reasonable in terms of token creation. In Standard and even Extended, we seem happy to commit five mana to one 1/1 token creature. Endrek Sahr, for five mana... Well, he doesn't give you any tokens for the first five, but he can give you quite a few in short order after that initial investment.

Now the main issue is that this legend is a 2/2 for five mana, which is not really a very efficient set of numbers. Untapping with Endrek Sahr in play is the first challenge, and in that sense, he mirrors Dralnu. Endrek is smaller, but at the same time, you are probably less worried about his biting a [Rift Bolt](#) or some such. Unlike Dralnu, if Endrek Sahr gets any value, you're probably still ahead even if his feeble body is dealt with.

While Dralnu probably has a more powerful upside, Endrek Sahr commands a lightning-fast effect on the board. I can see numerous offensive synergies with [Glare of Subdual](#), [Nantuko Shade](#), or even generic curve fatties like [Skeletal Vampire](#) that could prove highly effective.

As with many of the more fragile size-to-mana cost legends, Endrek Sahr will be more effective against some decks than in the abstract... Given the recent success of G/W [Glare of Subdual](#) decks (a family of decks that for

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all its success has almost no creature removal), Endrek Sahr may actually prove an interesting source of tokens to fight back.

### Flagstones of Trokair

This is arguably the strongest non-timeshifted card in *Time Spiral* and a short list card for best in Standard (I have it in the 4-6 range right now).

There are an insane number of reasons why **Flagstones of Trokair** is great. It comes into play untapped. It's better than a **Plains** (and **Plains** is hands down the best basic since 2006 Regionals). When you draw a second copy, you end up with a **Hallowed Fountain** and a **Sacred Foundry** and have thinned and shuffled your deck. It's good against **Wildfire**. It's better against **Smallpox**.

**Flagstones of Trokair** really is one of the strongest cards in the set. Most Standard decks that have a medium-or-better white requirement should just play four.

### Gemstone Caverns

I was really excited about this card in the beginning because Tsuyoshi Fujita made it, but in practice I have liked **Gemstone Caverns** less and less. Sure, when you have it in your opening hand on the draw you can sometimes crush the fair playing opponent with an explosive opening, but as great as the best upside can be, **Gemstone Caverns** is one of the worst imaginable topdecks, especially for a deck playing multiple copies.

### Ib Halfheart, Goblin Tactician

Ib Halfheart is a powerful threat in some Limited decks, but has a pretty serious fundamental flaw for Constructed regardless of how many **Mountains** you sacrifice: People don't block.

### Ith, High Arcanist

The more I think about it the more I like the suspend on Ith. Suspend got kind of a bad rap from tournament Spikes in the beginning, but the mechanic seems to be getting a little more popular.

You can curve Ith on the second turn but have counter mana to fight when he shows up four turns later. Ith might be a little under-powered at seven mana, but he seems pretty good for two, especially if you aren't planning to do anything else that turn. I have been trying to find a replacement for **Kamigawa Dragons** in various decks, and honestly, Ith doesn't seem half bad. He's got five on the back side, putting him out of **Wildfire** range, and the fact that he plays offense *and* defense in fact reminds me a bit of **Keiga, the Tide Star**. Ith isn't "better" in any way than Akroma, but he sure makes her look bad in a one-on-one.

### Jaya Ballard, Task Mage

I actually love every single thing about this card, including her illustration. Jaya has a lot of cross-block synergy, setting up everything from **Fiery Temper** madness to **hellbent Demonfire**. She just makes every topdeck better (what are you going to do with that seventh **Mountain** anyway?) and is *this close* to a legitimate finisher.

...Did I mention the illustration?

### Kaervek the Merciless

Limited bomb, Constructed... not so much. Kaervek just doesn't add up. Seven mana for your tap-out monolith is a lot, and when he can't withstand a **Char**? Kaervek just isn't very good against beatdown, at least at retail.

At seven mana, he is also problematic against control (that is, resolving sevens isn't the easiest process in the world versus **Mana Leak**, **Remand**, or almost anything). Once down, Kaervek is, however, incredibly potent, probably dealing four or six before he goes... not even counting the five from his front side swing.

I am just wondering if there is a way to get Kaervek in play against repetitive combo decks quickly. Like if you 'Song down Kaervek around turn four, it's probably next to impossible for **Dragonstorm** to go off. Seems like a lot of effort, though, given that you are already playing a color (Black) that can fight combo decks pretty well. While I am eternally a big fan of his Spite, Kaervek the *man* receives no soap from me at present.

### Kher Keep

**Kher Keep** is a lot less irrelevant than it might initially seem. In general 0/1 creatures are pretty irrelevant, sure, but in many spots you can just hide behind a Kobold until the opponent commits and you just murder him with the **Wrath of God** two-for-one. In that sense, **Kher Keep** is like a wildly less significant, but also far cheaper, **Prahv**, **Spires of Order**.

### Lim-Dul, the Necromancer

Seven mana is a hefty price tag for a 4/4 legend whose main capability is... to spend more mana. Obviously this is a powerful card with a cool ability (provided you get to play your game unmolested), but not necessarily one that we want to see in competitive Constructed, at least not at this price point. Comparable Standard sevens are either next-to-unkillable (**Simic Sky Swallower**) or have a tremendous and immediate effect on the board (**Rimescale Dragon** or **Rimefeather Owl**) *and* walk away from **Char** or **Wildfire**. The disadvantage to a card like this one is that even though there is some upside potential, the loss of tempo is massive if Lim-Dul doesn't come immediately online.

### Mangara of Corondor

This is a cute little **Vindicate**. Mangara is slow (compare to *actual Vindicate*), but also just one color, thirteen years removed from the first **Swords to Plowshares**. The big upside of Mangara is to play it in a



**Momentary Blink** deck. You can point this legend at the opponent's **Azorius Chancery**, **Angel of Wrath**, **Debtors' Knell**, essentially whatever you want short of a **Stromgald Crusader**, and respond by putting **Momentary Blink** on the stack. Mangara will reappear on your side untapped, but the initial target will never be seen again. Then you can flash back the Blink next turn!

### Mishra, Artificer Prodigy

Mishra *Mishra MISHRA!* Now *this* is a legend! Mishra isn't an 8/8 for five or anything, but he is basically a Baloth, an awesome set of stats at a very reasonable price point for the current Signet-rich Standard (especially impressive for a non-green creature). Speaking of Signets, Mishra doubles up however many you draw. I can't wait to see what kind of shenanigans this card wreaks on any format, because the excitement is physically palpable just thinking about him. In Standard all I've gotten to do has been to make a gazillion mana with Signets (and forgot to play **Demonfire** in that test deck) and slam down plus search up twin **Serrated Arrows** once. However in Extended look for Mishra to make a dizzy universe of **Sensei's Divining Tops** (think about that one) or other cheap baubles (and Baubles). If all else fails, you just cross the Red Zone with your four/four and they mark down their life total muttering to themselves while you have a ton of blue untapped.

### Norin the Wary

Next.

### Saffi Eriksdotter

Saffi is looking good (and I mean that in every way) in G/W already. She is a backbreaker for the poor Boros mage who has calculated the right positioning of his suicide runs and carefully measured every **Cryoclash** and **Seal of Fire**. She kind of stands next to the last remaining **Loxodon Hierarch** and waves "buh bye" to the Red Deck. This is an awful, *awful* human being Scout.

If you haven't heard, Saffi is also an infinite combo with **Crypt Champion**. Basically you play **Crypt Champion** without red, pick up Saffi, and with **Crypt Champion's** non-red drawback on the stack, point Ms. Eriksdotter right back at him. She'll hit the graveyard, he'll hit the graveyard; he'll come back, he'll *bring her* back; you'll rinse and repeat. You can do this as long as you like, triggering **Pandemonium** or...whatever. You can add this as a minute sub-theme in G/W Glare (a natural combination with **Congregation at Dawn**) or build some kind of **Enduring Renewal**-reminiscent Jonny shrine to cooperation between hot G/W babes and half-dead (but persistent) B/R, um, party animals, I guess. At Champs, there was even a Ghazi-Glare version that ran the three-card combination of Saffi, **Crypt Champion**, and **Soul Warden** for essentially infinite life!

Then again, you can just play her as an aggressive 2/2 for two in a deck that can utilize her ability quite well without any frills, as many of the successful Glare builds have.

### Scion of the Ur-Dragon

I am not sure how you would want to play this one. 4/4 flying for five is pretty standard, but not since 1997 or so has **Air Elemental** been good enough *in* Standard. The mana cost is a bit prohibitive, but not really that hard to set up with **Ravnica** duals, Signets, and **Farseek**. Obviously you will want a better upside or you would play anything else.

Now, smashing face mid-combat with a **Nicol Bolas** out of nowhere is very sexy. **Bogardan Hellkite** is less so, but can still be tricky (+1/+1 to dodge **Char** and get another point in there). The additional advantage of Scion of the Ur-Dragon is that when you run his ability, you are essentially setting up reanimation for the following turn. The downside is that some deck that would play this card would have to devote a pretty thick number of slots to Dragons, and given how expensive they are, drawing those cards out of order can be disastrous. Still, there is potential here because Scion of the Ur-Dragon lives in a strange world where it can play either setup man or cleanup or both, even in the same game.

### Stonebrow, Krosan Hero

Man! I have been trying to break this guy since I saw the spoiler. While Stonebrow is a lightning rod for **Psionic Blasts** when sitting at home, he is basically an **Invasion** Dragon on offense, and a pretty scary one at that. Set up with **Giant Solifuge** or get **Rumbling Slum** online with the Rage Pits, and you have some kind of wonderful Red Zone turn five or turn six. I can see Stonebrow playing **Skeletal Vampire** to a brood of mid-range Gruul-flavored fatties in a Jamie Wakefield-reminiscent stomp-stomp fest, and that deck being actually competitive. The questions are if you would *really* want to play fat trampleurs over regular old **Kird Apes**, or if G/R is better than, say, B/W at the mid-range attack. The answers aren't obvious here. Don't underestimate Stonebrow. You'll not like getting hit by him or his friends.

### Teferi, Mage of Zhalfir

Teferi is probably the next awesomest legend of the non-timeshifted lot after **Flagstones of Trokair**. He does everything, from nerfing any and all Suspends to bending the laws of **Magic: The Gathering**. Have you ever played **Mystical Teachings** to find **Niv-Mizzet**, the **Firemind** or **Rimefeather Owl**? Would you *like* to? Teferi has received some criticism for being weak against aggressive decks in Standard, but like my friend Billy Moreno says, "He still blocks the @\$% out of a **Watchwolf**."



### Thelon of Havenwood

If Fungus is a strategy, it'll be because of Thelon (and probably **Sporesower Thallid**). That's a big "if" though.

### Tivadar of Thorn

The short version is that this card is the worse - but possibly redundant - **Paladin en-Vec** in Standard, and the better **Paladin en-Vec** in some other formats. If you scour certain Extended lists you will see mages summoning **Mystic Crusaders** for further anti-Boros action, and **Tivadar of Thorn** is at least on par with **Mystic Crusader** (and would have been a windmill slam two years ago). Luckily it is two years ago in Legacy, where **Tivadar of Thorn** is like three hundred times more useful than **Paladin en-Vec** at the height of Jitte. This is a good card. You know it's a good card. The main question is where he finds space. In Standard **Paladin en-Vec** has fallen out of favor for lack of equipment, so Tivadar has few short-term buyers; in Extended it depends on the metagame, but he will probably be a fine murderer of **Goblin Legionnaires**; in Legacy he's a sure thing if you err white.



### Akroma, Angel of Wrath

The big girl is hands down the best legend in *Time Spiral*. I have Akroma as #3 overall in Standard, behind only **Wrath of God** and **Demonfire**; I thought this was a controversial pick and was surprised that Billy and BDM just nodded. Akroma is one half of the main endgame strategies in the format, and even if players all run thick stacks of **Condemns** and four **Faith's Fetters** in their sideboards, they should be quaking in their boots when her jeweled wings come a flappin'.

You know why she's great. You know how to get her into play. You voted for her.

### Eron the Relentless

I think Eron is probably too slow and fragile for serious play in 2006. In 1996, you might spy him in a winning "Home-dicapped" PTQ deck, but no one actually *wanted* to run him... They just had to have five **Homelands** cards. Maybe in an all-haste deck? He is an interesting case at eight mana, but probably not good enough.

### Jasmine Boreal

**Erhnam Djinn**, onetime paragon of the Standard body, was no longer good enough when he came back some Blocks ago. **Jasmine Boreal** is like the **Erhnam Djinn** with an extra W tax.

### Jolrael, Empress of Beasts

You can bend backwards a couple of weeks to [see what I had to say](#) about Jolrael in the hands of BDM and Jon Becker. One thing I missed then was **Crime // Punishment**, which is the best possible combination (Jolrael combination, that is) in Standard.

### Merieke Ri Berit

Merieke is so *close* to being a spectacular sideboard card. Why does she have that first line? The Solar Flare family could use some help against U/G, and Merieke would be even better against the **Psionic Blast**-deficient G/W. As a one-time **Control Magic** she's actually fine, but "fine" doesn't necessarily cut it. Splash Green for **Scryb Ranger**? Nah, I don't think so, either.

### Mirari

This thing is just waiting for a broken mana engine. When that engine shows up, watch out. **Mirari** was an All-Star in its own block and made a big showing in Standard, acing all kinds of Grand Prix and World Championship Day Ones in Mono-Black Control and Cunning Wake. If you've never played against **Diabolic Tutor** (or even **Tainted Pact**) with **Mirari** in play, count your blessings; it wasn't fun. Will UrzaTron be the right framework?

### Mistform Ultimus

Creature types include "Mutant," "Ninja," and "Turtle." That's hilarious, right? You can actually Rebel out a **Hill Giant** and piggyback a **Might Sliver**, too. I don't know if that makes **Mistform Ultimus** good in the present Standard. Still hilarious, though.

### Nicol Bolas

**Nicol Bolas** was like five seconds late to the party. Can you imagine **Gifts Ungiven** with him playing next to Yosei and **Greater Good**? That would have been the spiciest **Goryo's Vengeance** ever!

**Nicol Bolas** is obviously awesome once he gets to fisticuffs. That's not an issue. The question is to build around his limitations. 1) He's an eight drop. That means he is competing with Akroma and **Bogardan Hellkite**, two awesome eights, and as great as **Nicol Bolas** is, he isn't necessarily better than either. 2) Even in a cheater strategy like Reanimator, you have to play black, blue, and red. The reason is that after your **Dread Return** him up, you're still paying every upkeep just to keep him in a penthouse apartment or whatever. Neither one of these is a deal breaker by the way. I can definitely envision a B/U/R deck with a lot of legends that would rather not pay retail for some (say, **Garza Zol**, **Plague Queen**). Maybe Bolas can be a redundancy there. **Smallpox** to set up, anyone?

### Pendelhaven

This land is already breaking hearts. It's not just better than a **Forest**, it's probably better than Okina was. My favorite target in Standard is **Looter il-Kor**, but I must admit it feels good to pump the **Kird Ape** and then play the **Forest**. Most aggressive decks with any green at all will play one copy, and I can see the argument for two in many a deck, even those with Snow engines.

### Sol'kanar the Swamp King

This Demon is the epitome of efficiency. He is a 5/5 for five mana, which is remarkable in and of itself for a non-green creature (compare to [Skittering Horror](#)). Moreover, he's got two relevant abilities. Like a redundant yet cute kitten on the side of a tin can, Sol'kanar just needs a home. I've tried him in a deck with Mishra, and he was pretty good. B/U/R seems like a good color combination for mid-range Wakefield fatties - Signets to open and a lot of guys in the 4/4 to 6/6 range with disruption to slow down the faster decks early. Sol'kanar may be the inheritor to the *Kamigawa* Dragons in Standard, and you can make a nice case for him as the finisher in Chapin-style mana control with [Clutch of the Undercity](#) and [Wrecking Ball](#). Unlike most of the good finishers in Standard, Sol'kanar doesn't die to his own daddy's [Wildfire](#).

### Verdeloth the Ancient

This might not be the worst finisher in Ghazi-Glare. Most decks with [Congregation at Dawn](#) will run one [Tol'simir Wolfblood](#), or a [Gleancrawler](#), or her ladyship the Angel of Wrath... This Treefolk legend as a late-game one-of seems pretty monolithic, and not bad at all with [Selesnya Guildmage](#) and a certain City-Tree. I'm not putting any guarantees on this one, but I can definitely see the possibilities here. Plus, what's more disheartening for the opponent than losing to [Verdeloth](#)? I mean really?



### Vhati il-Dal

I just can't imagine Vhati // -Dal is good enough in Golgari colors in Standard. At four he's competing with everything from [Call of the Herd](#) flashback (more threats at the same size) to [Plague Sliver](#) to splashed [Loxodon Hierarch](#), to just a third-turn [Persecute](#) (sick). 3/3 with an interesting but probably marginal ability is not going to put the wind in any sails at four mana, at least not maindeck.

This is the concluding paragraph. This paragraph is where I thank you for tuning in to another week of Swimming With Sharks and express the hope that you enjoyed the *Legends of Time Spiral* edition. Lastly, I bid *adieu* and remind you to check back next Thursday.

*Mike has been a leading voice in the game's strategy for as long as there has been a **Magic** Internet. He is the former editor of *The Magic Dojo* and a sometime Pro player. *Michael J. Flores: Deckade*, is a compilation of Mike's first ten years of strategy and theory (i.e. before he joined [magicthegathering.com](#)), and is available at <http://www.top8magic.com>.*



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