

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns

# Sets of Five, Part I

Ben Bleiweiss  
 Uncommon Knowledge  
 Wednesday, July 10, 2002



Here we are, smack in the middle of Cycle Week. Some weeks ago, I called up Aaron and asked him if I could do an abnormally long article about the cycles of **Magic**. Coincidentally, he had been thinking about making a cycle theme week for MagicTheGathering.com. My call just expedited the process, and I'm thankful that we've gotten to this topic sooner than later. Why's that, you ask? I love cycles!

Go back and read [Mark's article](#) from Monday about the aesthetics of cycles. There's just something really appealing about a set of five cards that have symmetry with one another. They are the cards that each of the colors share and compare, since each color has a variation on the theme. Indirectly you might argue whether [Serra Angel](#), [Sengir Vampire](#), or [Shivan Dragon](#) is the most powerful, but directly you can compare the uses of [Perish](#) in *Sixth Edition* versus [Warthog](#) (obviously [Perish](#) way out-powered [Warthog](#). [What were they thinking?](#)).

Here's the definition I use: A cycle is a group of five related cards where each color is represented by one card in the cycle. They can be any type of card, including lands and artifacts. Each cycle contains a theme. Most are linked by gameplay mechanics, while some are linked by the color wheel and flavor.



The color wheel is very important for cycles. If you flip over a **Magic** card, you'll see the five-color pentagon on back. Starting from the top and going clockwise, you have white, blue, black, red, and green. Accordingly, all cards on the below lists have been arranged in that order.

I've tried to make this list as complete as possible. One or two cycles might have slipped through the cracks. If they have, please contact me at [bleiweiss1@cox.net](mailto:bleiweiss1@cox.net) so I can add them to this list for the future. As far as I know, this is the first attempt to catalog every cycle in **Magic**, and I hope that you enjoy the effort and the comments that go along with each.

Because this is such a huge comprehensive list, it will be presented in two parts. The first will cover the base sets and all expansions from *Arabian Nights* to

*Weatherlight*, and next week we'll pick up with *Tempest* through the present. Remember, if you don't know what a card does, you can click the name to see an image of the card.

## The Base Sets (Alpha/Beta/Unlimited/Revised/4th/5th/6th/7th):

- 1) Circle of Protection: White, Circle of Protection: Blue, Circle of Protection: Black, Circle of Protection: Red, Circle of Protection: Green
- 2) Conversion, Lifetap, Gloom, Red Elemental Blast, Lifeforce
- 3) Healing Salve, Ancestral Recall, Dark Ritual, Lightning Bolt, Giant Growth
- 4) Ivory Cup, Crystal Rod, Throne of Bone, Iron Star, Wooden Sphere
- 5) Karma, Blue Elemental Blast, Deathgrip, Flashfires, Tsunami
- 6) Mox Pearl, Mox Sapphire, Mox Jet, Mox Ruby, Mox Emerald
- 7) Plains, Island, Swamp, Mountain, Forest
- 8) Purelace, Thoughtlace, Deathlace, Chaoslace, Lifelace
- 9) Scrubland, Plateau, Volcanic Island, Tropical Island, Bayou
- 10) Tundra, Savannah, Underground Sea, Badlands, Taiga
- 11) White Ward, Blue Ward, Black Ward, Red Ward, Green Ward
- \*6th) Light of Day, Chill, Perish, Flashfires, River Boa
- \*6th) Warmth, Insight, Dread of Night, Boil, Warthog
- \*7th) Sanctimony, Hibernation, Yawgmoth's Edict, Boil, Compost
- \*7th) Starlight, Baleful Stare, Bereavement, Disorder, Thoughtleech

- Although there are each of the five colors of **Magic** represented in each cycle, that doesn't mean each of the colors has an equal number of cards which belong to cycles. White by and far has more cycle cards than any other color in **Magic**, due to the various 'protection' type spells it is given. In this set, Circles of Protection and Wards put white ahead of the count for good.
- Most cards in a cycle share the same rarity, but this set didn't clearly establish that. [Ancestral Recall](#), [Blue Elemental Blast](#), and [Red Elemental Blast](#) all were different rarities than the other four cards in their respective cycles.
- The Boon cycle consists of cards which cost one mana and give you three of something in return. They established many integral themes for their colors from the get-go: White would prevent damage and gain life, blue would draw cards, black would give up resources for speed, red would deal direct damage, and green would make creatures bigger. [Ancestral Recall](#) was deemed too powerful and removed from *Revised* edition. [Lightning Bolt](#) was the next to go, appearing last in *Fourth Edition*. [Dark Ritual](#) left with *Sixth Edition*, leaving only [Healing Salve](#) and [Giant Growth](#) in the current base set.
- Color hosing cards in the list usually come as two cycles at once. They are broken down by going clockwise or counterclockwise on



Update on Rain Delay



the color wheel. For instance, for the **Karma** cycle, start at white and follow the wheel clockwise. The first enemy color hit is black. For blue, the first color hit is red, so **Blue Elemental Blast** joins this cycle.

- The most reprinted cycle in **Magic**, of course, is the basic land cycle of **Plains, Island, Swamp, Mountain, and Forest**. The second-most reprinted cycle are the Circles of Protection, which have appeared in every base set so far, plus *Ice Age*.
- The two color hosing cycles from A/B/U remained the same until *Sixth Edition*, except that **Pyroblast** and **Hydroblast** were substituted for Red and Blue Elemental Blasts.
- The dual lands, both allied and enemy colored, were rotated out in *Fourth Edition*. They were replaced in *Fifth Edition* by the allied color pain lands from *Ice Age*, and the ten lands from *Fallen Empires* (see *Fallen Empires*). The storage lands were rotated out of *Classic*, and the sacrifice lands went the way of the dodo by *Seventh*.
- The Moxes were rotated out entirely by *Revised*, the only cycle in A/B/U to completely disappear. They were replaced several times in the base set, first by the *Legend's* Mana Batteries (*Fourth Edition*), and then by the *Mirage* Diamonds (*Sixth Edition* onwards).
- The five Laces lasted mercifully only until Fourth edition, when they finally got the can.
- The uncommon color hosers have rotated in both *Sixth* and *Seventh Edition*, with **Boil** being the only card to be carried over from one set to another. *Portal* cards **Starlight** and **Baleful Stare** were rotated into the base edition for the first time to complete their respective cycles.



## Arabian Nights:

- There were no white Djinn or Efreet, keeping *Arabian Nights* from having any complete cycles.

## Antiquities:

- While *Antiquities* did not contain any cycles *per se*, it did start the first mega-cycle in the history of **Magic**. A mega-cycle is a cycle of cards which extend over the course of several sets. While nearly every card in the set dealt with artifacts, **Ato** stood out as a fan favorite due to his big toothy grin and tournament playability. Over the course of the next few years, atogs would be introduced for each color. *Odyssey* would pay homage to this mega-cycle with a self-contained cycle of multi-colored atogs (see *Odyssey*).

## Legends:

- 1) Cathedral of Serra, Seafarer's Quay, Unholy Citadel, Mountain Stronghold, Adventurer's Guildhouse
- 2) Chromium, Arcades Sabbath, Palladia-Mors, Nicol Bolas, Vaevictis Asmadi
- 3) Glyph of Life, Glyph of Delusion, Glyph of Doom, Glyph of Destruction, Glyph of Reincarnation
- 4) Great Wall, Undertow, Quagmire, Crevasse, Deadfall
- 5) Heaven's Gate, Sea Kings' Blessing, Touch of Darkness, Dwarven Song, Sylvan Paradise
- 6) Karakas, Tolaria, Urborg, Hammerheim, Pendelhaven
- 7) White Mana Battery, Blue Mana Battery, Black Mana Battery, Red Mana Battery, Green Mana Battery

- Of all the cycles in **Magic**, the hardest one to name would be the bands-with-others land cycle from *Legends*. Not only were the cards hardly used, but they all have long, involved names.
- The Elder Dragon Legends were not only the first gold-colored cycle, but also the first true creature cycle in **Magic**.
- All the "Summon Legend" cards fall into a [regular pattern](#), which makes them a sort of "giant cycle".
- The color-wash (**Heaven's Gate**) cycle emulates the previous Lace cycle from A/B/U (see Base Sets)
- The Mana Battery cycle emulates the Mox cycle from A/B/U (See Base Sets).
- The first Legendary Land cycle didn't correspond very well to the abilities of their colors. For instance, **Karakas** unsummons creatures, which is clearly a blue ability. **Urborg** removes first strike (more of a red or white ability), while **Tolaria** removes banding (definitely a white ability).
- It's interesting to look at the Glyph cycle to see what abilities were being added to each color. White and black both continued their themes of life gain and creature kill, but red invoked massive power gain at the cost of self-destruction. Green delved into the normally black ability of reanimation, and blue added the ability to keep creatures tapped down to its repertoire.
- There were no white Enchant World cards, so no cycle there.



## Fallen Empires:

- 1) Balm of Restoration, Conch Horn, Implements of Sacrifice, Aeolipile, Elven Lyre
- 2) Icatian Store, Sand Silos, Bottomless Vault, Dwarven Hold, Hollow Trees
- 3) Ruins of Trokair, Svyelunite Temple, Ebon Stronghold, Dwarven Ruins, Havenwood Battleground

- The **Neo-Boon cycle** correspond one for one to the originally boon cycle from A/B/U (see Base Sets). The Balm is **Healing Salve**, the Horn is **Ancestral Recall**, the Implements are **Dark Ritual**, the Aeolipile is **Lightning Bolt**, and the Lyre is **Giant Growth**.
- This was the first go at storage lands. They would later be attempted again during *Mercadian Masques* (see *Mercadian Masques*). These must remain tapped each turn to get a counter, rendering them unusable for that turn. The *Masques* lands conversely can be untapped for mana each turn, and used to store mana if not used.

## Ice Age:

- 1) Adarkar Wastes, Brushland, Underground River, Sulfurous Springs, Karplusan Forest
- 2) Circle of Protection: White, Circle of Protection: Blue, Circle of Protection: Black, Circle of Protection: Red, Circle of Protection: Green
- 3) Drought, Leshrac's Sigil, Hydroblast, Anarchy, Thoughleech
- 4) Glaciers, Reclamation, Flooded Woodlands, Ghostly Flame, Monsoon
- 5) Justice, Breath of Dreams, Stench of Evil, Pyroblast, Freyalise's Charm
- 6) Land Cap, Veldt, River Delta, Lava Tubes, Timberline Ridge
- 7) Merieke Ri Berit, Storm Spirit, Fiery Justice, Elemental Augury, Earthlink
- 8) Nacre Talisman, Lapis Lazuli Talisman, Onyx Talisman, Hematite Talisman, Malachite Talisman
- 9) White Scarab, Blue Scarab, Black Scarab, Red Scarab, Green Scarab

- Wizards printed two cycles of allied color dual lands, the painlands and the stay-tapped lands (**Veldt**). They were an attempt to replace the same cycle from A/B/U (See Base Sets). The painlands have survived to present day. The others have not.
- This set contains the first color-hosing cycles in an expansion set. There are three separate cycles: two uncommon cycles that go clockwise and counterclockwise on the color wheel, and a third rare cycle of gold cards. While it's obvious what four of the cards in the rare cycle are for, **Ghostly Flame** isn't straight forward. It was designed as a way for black and red to get around Circles of Protection, which are only contained in white (their enemy on the color wheel).
- Normally you could easily look at five cards of a cycle and pick out which one belongs to which color based on the colors used in the artwork alone. The Talisman cycle might be the only cycle in Magic which doesn't really fit this bill. **Onyx Talisman** (the black one) looks mainly white in the art, while **Hematite Talisman** (the red one) doesn't have a single piece of red in the artwork, and in fact looks green!



## Homelands:

- 1) Wizards' School, Aysen Abbey, An-Havva Township, Castle Sengir, Koskun Keep
- The first attempt at tri-colored lands. These would be attempted again many years later in *Planeshift* with the Dragon Lair cycle (see *Planeshift*).

## Alliances:

- 1) Energy Arc, Nature's Blessing, Lim-Dul's Vault, Lim-Dul's Paladin, Surge of Strength
- 2) Kjeldoran Outpost, Soldevi Excavations, Lake of the Dead, Balduvian Trading Post, Heart of Yavimaya
- 3) Royal Decree, Tidal Control, Dystopia, Omen of Fire, Nature's Wrath
- 4) Scars of the Veteran, Force of Will, Contagion, Pyrokinesis, Bounty of the Hunt
- 5) Wandering Mage, Phelddagrif, Winter's Night, Lord of Tresserhorn, Misfortune

- The double-color hose cycle here was the first attempt at allowing each color to hose both their enemies at once. Similar cycles would be attempted in *Mercadian Masques*, though by then the power level was cranked way down (see *Mercadian Masques*).
- The original Pitch cycle, named for their alternate costs of pitching a card, are one of the most popular cycles ever printed in **Magic**. AC cycles were repeated in *Masques* and *Prophecy* (see *Mercadian Masques* and *Prophecy*), but none have matched the level of love that people have for these original five.
- **Phelddagrif** in this set could gain flying from white in exchange for giving the opponent two life, bounce itself for a blue allowing the opponent to draw a card, and trample from green while giving the opponent a 1/1 creature. The reincarnation of **Phelddagrif**, **Questing Phelddagrif** (see *Planeshift*), mixed those abilities up. The newer Grif gained flying for blue (more in line with the activation color), gained protection from red and black for the white ability (the two colors not represented by the card itself), and gained +1/+1 instead of trample for the green ability. Both the cards had the same penalties for activating abilities. The Questing Grif shows a clear evolution of the card, as each of the abilities corresponds more accurately to the color to which it is associated.

## Mirage:

- 1) Civic Guildmage, Shaper Guildmage, Shadow Guildmage, Armorer Guildmage, Granger Guildmage
- 2) Flood Plains, Grasslands, Bad River, Rocky Tar Pit, Mountain Valley
- 3) Hazerider Drake, Radiant Essence, Haunting Apparation, Shauku's Minion, Windreaper Falcon
- 4) Ivory Charm, Sapphire Charm, Ebony Charm, Chaos Charm, Seedling Charm
- 5) Marble Diamond, Sky Diamond, Charcoal Diamond, Fire Diamond, Moss Diamond
- 6) Melesse Spirit, Suq'Ata Firewalker, Barbed-Back Wurm, Wildfire Emissary, Karoo Meerkat
- 7) Pearl Dragon, Mist Dragon, Catacomb Dragon, Volcanic Dragon, Canopy Dragon
- 8) Prismatic Boon, Vitalizing Cascade, Sealed Fate, Kaervek's Purge, Savage Twister
- 9) Shadowbane, Ether Well, Kaervek's Hex, Cinder Cloud, Tropical Storm
- 10) Unyaro Griffin, Cerulean Wyvern, Soul Rend, Sirocco, Decomposition
- 11) Wall of Resistance, Floodgate, Wall of Corpses, Blistering Barrier, Wall of Roots
- 12) Ward of Lights, Soar, Grave Servitude, Lightning Reflexes, Armor of Thorns

- The original Guildmage cycle consisted of creatures which could be activated using colors of allied mana. These would be repeated twice more, once in *Invasion* and once in *Apocalypse* using enemy colors (See *Invasion* and *Apocalypse*). The abilities changed from set to set. A white gave a creature first strike in *Mirage*, tapped down a creature in *Invasion*, and a point of damage prevention in *Apocalypse*. Blue allowed to return a creature you control to the top of your deck in both allied guildmages, but gave a creature flying as an enemy color. Black gave a creature +1/+0, then made your opponent lose a life, and finally gave a creature -2/-0. Red pinged for a point of damage originally, moved to giving a creature first strike (gaining white's former ability), and finally ended up by giving a creature +2/+0. Green originally gave a creature +0/+1, then combined its ability with black's former activation to give a creature +1/+1, and ended in *Apocalypse* by allowing you to produce any color of mana.
- There are four (!) color hosing cycles in the uncommon slots of this set. The ones beginning with **Melesse Spirit** and **Unyaro Griffin** go clockwise and counterclockwise along the color wheel. The gold cycle hoses the shared enemy color. The last cycle, beginning with **Shadowbane**, are cards which can be used against any color, but have an extra effect against an enemy color clockwise along the color wheel.
- This set contains the first "Insta-chantment" cycle (**Ward of Lights**), enchantments which can be cast at the speed of an instant. These would be revisited during *Masques* block (see *Mercadian Masques*, *Prophecy*). The ones from this set were strictly inferior, since they went away at the end of turn.
- The Charms were repeated twice more, once in *Visions* and once in *Planeshift* (see *Visions*, *Planeshift*). They were also very similar to the cycles of split cards from *Invasion* block, since they allowed you to use the same card for multiple different effects (see *Invasion*, *Apocalypse*).
- This set began the [mega-mega-cycle of Legendary Lands](#), with **Teferi's Isle**. It also contains **Foratog** of the Atog cycle.
- Every now and again you'll get a card printed which encompasses the abilities of cards from an entire cycle. **Prismatic Lace** emulates the Lace cycle from Alpha pretty well (though it can't hit spells -- see Base Sets).



## Visions:

- 1) Honorable Passage, Dream Tides, Desolation, Heat Wave, Elephant Grass
- 2) Hope Charm, Vision Charm, Funeral Charm, Hearth Charm, Emerald Charm
- 3) Karoo, Coral Atoll, Everglades, Dormant Volcano, Jungle Basin
- 4) Righteous War, Suleiman's Legacy, Firestorm Hellkite, Pygmy Hippo, Squandered Resources

- If you look at the six abilities for each color between their charms in this set and the last, you can have a pretty good gauge of the abilities of each color in **Magic**. (see *Mirage*)
- This set contains **Chronatog** of the mega Atog cycle.

## Weatherlight:

- Cycle-free, *Weatherlight* set contains **Necratog** of the mega Atog cycle.

Next week, I'll finish this monstrous list with the more recent sets. Like I said before, email me if you see anything missing...

Ben may be reached at [bleiweiss1@cox.net](mailto:bleiweiss1@cox.net).

Ben Bleiweiss has written about his obsession with **Magic: The Gathering** for over a decade. He's travelled the world because of **Magic**, both as a player and a writer. When not spending time playing **Magic**, writing about **Magic**, or thinking about **Magic**, Ben is employed by *StarCityGames.com*, where he works with **Magic** cards all day long. He lives with his wife in Virginia, and they sleep comfortably at night under their Orgg down comforter.



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Ben Bleiweiss](#) archive

© 1995-2007 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.  
[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

