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Nature and Nurture

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When I first began writing for MagicTheGathering.com back in January, Mark and Aaron sent me an email detailing the first few columns we'd be producing. They all centered on *Torment* previews, and therefore the color black. My first assignment centered around [Lchorid](#) and cards with the tombstone symbol, followed by [Faceless Butcher](#) and other cards which temporarily removed other cards from the game, an examination of the [top five black sets](#) of all time, and a look at [Basking Rootwalla](#) and other discard hosers.

Finally given free choice over subject matter, I decided to dedicate each of the next few weeks to exploring a facet of each color in **Magic**. I dove into [blue creature types](#), [anti-white hosers](#), and one mana cost [direct damage spells](#).

Black, blue, white and red.

And then there was the infamous [green column](#).

IT'S EASY BEING GREEN

Even though I'd qualify that Zoo column as an unqualified disaster, my head was in the right place. When people think of green, they think fatties. They imagine big hulking monstrosities roaring across the forests to smash in your face. Maybe they envision elves protecting the woods, aided by ancient Treefolk and ferocious woodland animals. Either way, green is the color of nature.

Today I'll be taking a look at the top five green expansions of all time. As with my black set ranking, I'd like to establish a few ground rules before I delve into the cards.

1. Not everyone will agree with my rankings. That's fine; these are my opinions. It was very difficult for me to narrow this list down to just five sets, but these are the guns I'm sticking to.
2. Only expansion sets are up for consideration. This means that all of the basic editions, from Alpha through *Seventh Edition* are right out. Onslaught also will not be ranked since its power level hasn't been gauged through actual play yet.
3. Reprints (such as [Rampant Growth](#)) don't count as much past their initial appearance. Necessity is the mother of all invention, and we're talking about Mother Nature after all.
4. Gold cards don't count at all. I did this in the last set ranking, and I'm sticking to my guns here. Wouldn't be fair to black to change the rules midstream, would it?
5. Cards played primarily in constructed, especially those which defined entire deck archetypes, really make up the meat and bones of these rankings. Sorry Anthony, but this isn't about the multi-players.
6. Just remember, this isn't a game of kick-the-Ouphe. Accordingly, send all comments to bleiweiss1@cox.net.

Let's get down to business, shall we?

NUMBER FIVE: URZA'S DESTINY

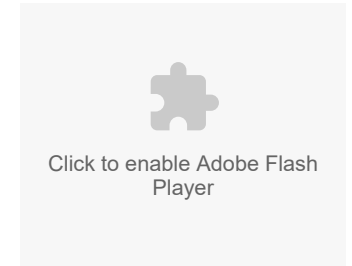
Cards of Note: Compost; Elvish Piper; Emperor Crocodile; Heart Warden; Pattern of Rebirth; Plow Under; Rofellos, Llanowar Emissary; Splinter; Thorn Elemental; Yavimaya Elder; Yavimaya Enchantress.

Why is it number five?: Narrowly edging out *Urza's Legacy*, *Urza's Destiny* offers up a cornucopia of green creatures and spells. While the cards in this set weren't environmentally defining cards such as [Survival of the Fittest](#) or [Oath of Druids](#) from *Exodus* (which also finishes outside the top five), they filled a ton of different needs for green mages everywhere. From mana acceleration to mana denial and all points in between, *Urza's Destiny* is your set.

- [Thorn Elemental](#) replaced [Force of Nature](#) and [Verdant Force](#) as fatty of choice for many players. "New trample" removed the blocking option from combat. If [Thorn Elemental](#) wants to deal seven damage, [Thorn Elemental](#) gets to deal seven damage.
- Amazing mana accelerator [Rofellos, Llanowar Emissary](#) enabled green mages to make ridiculous six mana plays on the third turn (tap three forests + tap Rofellos).
- [Pattern of Rebirth](#) was an integral part of a strange combo deck involving [Phyrexian Ghoul](#). Ideally, you'd play a first turn [Birds of Paradise](#), and follow it up with a second turn Ghoul. Then, on your third turn, you'd cast [Academy Rector](#). It'd be sacrificed to the Ghoul (which goes to 4/4), and used to fetch [Pattern of Rebirth](#), which went on the Birds. The Birds in turn feeds the Ghoul (6/6) and brings another Rector into play. That Rector is fed to the Ghoul (8/8), bringing [Saproling Burst](#) into play. Then you'd make six 1/1 tokens with the Burst, all of which go to make the Ghoul 20/20. That's not bad for a third turn play involving three cards (the Bird, the Ghoul, the Rector).



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA



Update on Rain Delay



- As long as you're playing with Rofellos, why not utterly frustrate your opponent with a third turn **Plow Under**? Nothing setting your opponent back two turns before they've ever had a chance to play the game.
- Green, not normally known for card drawing, received two gifts. **Compost** remains to this day one of the best sideboard cards against black decks. More important is **Yavimaya Elder**. This little guy gives four for one card advantage, smoothes out mana bases, and beats down the whole while. What more could you ask for?



NUMBER FOUR: VISIONS

Cards of Note: City of Solitude, Creeping Mold, Elephant Grass, Emerald Charm, Natural Order, Quirion Ranger, River Boa, Stomping Wildebeests, Uktabi Orangutan, Warthog



Why is it number four?: There's a reason nobody plays green in Type 1: All of the old green cards rank somewhere in usefulness between **Lance** and **Reflexes**. Sure, you might get an occasional **Sylvan Library** (to use in your blue deck) or **Birds of Paradise** (to use in your blue deck) or **Kird Ape** (wait, that's not green). Never mind. **Visions** marks the point where green started getting multiple tournament-worthy cards per set.

- **River Boa**. Forget **Scragnoth**, **Blurred Mongoose**, and **Spellbane Centaur**. To destroy the islands you must walk the islands, and none do it better than the snake. Black gets a 1/1 regenerator for 1. Green gets a 2/1 island walking regenerator. To note, this still does not make up for **Perish**.
- Want to kill flyers, pesky enchantments, or attacking creatures? **Emerald Charm** provides a three-in-one solution for a single mana. **Creeping Mold** allows for similar versatility, at a slightly higher cost.
- "187" creature (meaning it kills something when it comes into play) **Uktabi Orangutan** terrorized artifacts for years. **Stomping Wildebeests** gave green a way to recur said monkey, along with **Wall of Blossoms**, **Spikes**, and other creatures that might want to be replayed.
- **Natural Order** played an integral part of the Secret Force deck.

Secret Force		
Jamie Wakefield		
Main Deck 60 cards		
3 Gaea's Cradle	3 Elvish Lyrist	4 Creeping Mold
16 Forests	4 Fyndhorn Elves	4 Natural Order
3 Wastelands	4 Llanowar Elves	3 Overrun
22 lands	4 Spike Feeder	
	2 Spike Weaver	11 other spells
	3 Uktabi Orangutan	
	3 Verdant Force	
	4 Wall of Roots	
	27 creatures	

- You know [what I think](#) about **Quirion Ranger**.

NUMBER THREE: URZA'S SAGA

Cards of Note: Abundance, Albino Troll, Argothian Enchantress, Blanchwood Armor, Carpet of Flowers, Elvish Lyryst, Exploration, Fecundity, Fertile Ground, Gaea's Cradle, Gaea's Embrace, Hush, Pouncing Jaguar, Priest of Titania, Symbiosis, Wild Dogs



Why is it number three?: *Urza's Saga* plays like a greatest hits collection for green's one and two drop slots. Shall we take a peek?

- Stomp stomp stompy! This mono-green deck sports almost all one drops. **Pouncing Jaguar**, **Wild Dogs**, and **Elvish Lyryst** all fit snugly into the mana curve.
- **Priest of Titania** was so good with Elves that it had to be stricken from *Onslaught*. Elf-Ball was a deck that took advantage of the Priest and **Gaea's Cradle** to deliver truly massive (read: 10+ damage) **Fireballs** starting on turn four.
- **Exploration** found a home in Zvi Mowshowitz's Turbo Land deck:

Turbo Land: Plan B		Main Deck	
Zvi Mowshowitz		60 cards	
4 Thawing Glaciers		4 Force of Will	
4 Tropical Island	0 creatures	4 Counterspell	
3 Forest		4 Brainstorm	
2 Treetop Village		4 Accumulated Knowledge	
1 Dust Bowl		4 Horn of Greed	
10 Island		4 Exploration	
24 lands		3 Call of the Herd	
		3 Time Warp	
		2 Intuition	
		2 Scroll Rack	
		2 Gaea's Blessing	
		36 other spells	

- **Fertile Ground**, mainstay of the five color *Invasion* block, first made an appearance in the decidedly less manariffic *Urza* block. More importantly at the time was the card-drawing **Argothian Enchantress**, and the spectacular 3/3 regenerator known as **Albino Troll**. What do all three have in common? Their mana cost, of course.

NUMBER TWO: TEMPEST

Cards of Note: Aluren, Choke, Earthcraft, Eladamri's Vineyard, Elvish Fury, Harrow, Muscle Sliver, Overrun, Rampant Growth (reprint), Reap, Recycle, Root Maze, Rootwalla, Scragnoth, Trained Armodon, Tranquility (reprint), Verdant Force, Winter's Grasp.

Why is it number two?: *The Best Fatty Ever Printed*. The best **Giant Growth** ever. The best mana diversifiers. Not one, but two engine cards. What more could you want from a green set?

- **Verdant Force**. He's big, he's mean, he's green, and he's here to kick your butt. Not only does he bring his big bad self to the party, but he brings along friends each and every turn. There's nothing better than a party guest who brings along his own salad.
- **Overrun**. No other card has made horrible Gray Ogres so good in sealed deck and draft. Your creatures become huge and trampling. All of them. Your opponent becomes flattened and dead. All of him.
- Want mana diversification? Try **Harrow**, which makes its first triumphant appearance as an uncommon in *Tempest*. Later it'd be deemed important enough to become common just in time for *Invasion*.
- **Perish** appears in this set, and goes down in history as the single harshest hoser ever. **Choke** comes somewhere near the top of that list, shutting down many a blue player. **Scragnoth** furthered the mad-on green had for *la agua*.
- **Earthcraft** got itself banned in Standard and Extended for being too good in conjunction with many an infinite mana combo, especially when combined with **Fertile Ground**. Good thing too, because it is obscene being able to make infinite squirrel tokens with **Squirrel Nest**. Please, exterminate squirrel tokens.
- **Aluren**, the second combo engine card green received in this set, still sees play to this day. Look for **Aluren** decks to see play at Pro Tour - Houston in a couple of weeks.

NUMBER ONE: ODYSSEY

Cards of Note: Bearscape, Beast Attack, Call of the Herd, Chatter of the Squirrel, Diligent Farmhand, Druid Lyrst, Ground Seal, Holistic Wisdom, Krosan Beast, Moment's Peace, Muscle Burst, Nantuko Shrine, Nimble Mongoose, Overrun (reprint), Rites of Spring, Roar of the Wurm, Spellbane Centaur, Squirrel Nest, Sylvan Might, Terravore, Werebear, Wild Mongrel.

Why is it number one?: Did you see the list right above? Twenty-three constructed-worthy cards for green in one set! Some people cry that green has gotten the shaft, that green isn't powerful enough, and that green hasn't gotten any good cards.



Cry me a river, because green has been steadily getting the goods ever since Jamie Wakefield made a federal case out of the weakness of green. *Odyssey* marks the first time that green got the *most* good cards in one base set.

- Flashback token creatures gave green a way to garner card advantage without having to sacrifice beatdown time. **Call of the Herd** led this charge, and was closely followed by **Roar of the Wurm**, **Beast Attack**, and **Chatter of the Squirrel**.
- Speaking of Squirrels, they finally came of their own in *Odyssey*. Aside from the aforementioned **Chatter**, there was the über-creature generator **Squirrel Nest** and the hugely thresholded **Krosan Beast**.
- Speaking of threshold, **Werebear** did something that hadn't been done before in **Magic**: it replaced **Llanowar Elves**. You see, there's a long history of two-drop Elves in previous blocks which just weren't quite good enough to justify an extra colorless mana. This time around, the promise of a 4/4 body in the late game more than made up for the slight loss of early mana acceleration.
- **Terravore** and **Nimble Mongoose** found a home in a deck known as Balancing Tings, which combined the power of sacrifice lands from *Invasion* with **Balancing Act** from *Odyssey*. In between the two were the only actual kill cards in the deck, the 'Vore and the 'Goose.
- **Bearscape**: A way to turn all your old spells into new creatures. **Holistic Wisdom**: A way to turn all new spells into old spells. Remember kids, nature loves people who find ways to recycle.
- And lastly, I'll just leave you with the best bear ever. It's a Hound, it's a ridiculous madness, threshold and flashback enabler, and it very nearly can't be killed. **Wild Mongrel**.

Next week: The **winner** of the Create-Your-Own-Column contest.

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*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.*



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