



# Getting Down To Nonbasics

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Learning Curve  
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In his introduction to Nonbasic Land Week, [Mark Rosewater](#) talked about R&D's rule that a nonbasic land cannot be strictly better than a basic land. He used the most famous example of nonbasics -- the so-called "dual lands" -- as an illustration of where this rule was broken.

It is unlikely that there has ever been a group of lands more popular than the original Alpha dual lands. Now that I think about it, dual lands changed my life. It was mid-1994 and in the New York area, the **Magic** boom was just starting. I had been trying to work out a trade for a friend's dual lands, and we could not find anything that my friend wanted. I ended up giving him a dollar apiece and walked away with one of each of the ten lands. About two blocks away it suddenly occurred to me that I had just paid money for **Magic** cards. If I was willing to do it, there must be others who would as well. It was only a few months later that the groundwork was laid for what would eventually become Neutral Ground.

Ever since that dark period when the dual lands were not included in the *Fourth Edition* core set, players have clamored for replacements and R&D has attempted to oblige while building a variety of drawbacks into each attempt. The last several blocks have been a boom time for pseudo-duals. In the *Invasion*, *Odyssey*, and *Onslaught* blocks, there are four cycles of such lands each with a different drawback. In today's column, I am going to take a look at each cycle, its drawbacks and how those drawbacks affect your decisions when constructing a deck.

## Comes into Play Tapped

*Invasion* was the dawn of a new era for pseudo-duals. **Coastal Tower**, **Salt Marsh**, **Elfhame Palace**, **Urborg Volcano**, and **Shivan Oasis** all provided allied colors of mana, but they came into play tapped. Once these cards are untapped, there were no drawbacks to be found. At first, they were a staple of many Standard decks of that time. It wasn't too long before the fact that they came into play tapped began to edge them out of more aggressive decks. **Coastal Tower** and **Salt Marsh** remained in control decks until the *Invasion* block rotated out of Standard, but **Shivan Oasis** found itself sitting on the bench in decks featuring **Fires of Yavimaya** and other aggressive decks at the time. Aggressive decks rely on using their mana each turn and presenting an escalating series of threats based on the mana they have available. **Shivan Oasis** can throw a wrench into the works if it comes into play any later than the first or second turn. **Control decks**, on the other hand, are able to take their time and can afford to play a **Coastal Tower** or a **Salt Marsh** on turn three.



Go-Mar		
Barcelona Masters Series, May 2001 Standard, Jon Finkel		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards		
4 Coastal Tower	4 Absorb	2 Aura Blast
8 Island	4 Dromar's Charm	3 Crusading Knight
7 Plains	3 Exclude	4 Gainsay
	4 Fact or Fiction	1 Lobotomy
		3 Prison Barricade

4 Salt Marsh	2 Lobotomy	1 Repulse
3 Swamp	4 Opt	1 Rout
26 lands	1 Recoil	15 sideboard cards
2 Dromar, the Banisher	3 Rout	
4 Galina's Knight	2 Spite/Malice	
6 creatures	1 Yawgmoth's Agenda	
	28 other spells	

## Pain Lands

Ever since the allied-color *Ice Age* pain lands, **Magic** players have clamored for the five enemy-color dual lands to make an appearance. There were the *Tempest* "comes into play tapped" pain lands, like *Skyshroud Forest*, but players demanded the pure blue-green equivalent of *Adarkar Wastes*. *Apocalypse* was Christmas morning for those players. Not only did the set have a variety of multicolored cards that paired enemy colors, but it had the five enemy-color pain lands that everyone had been clamoring for since the days when *Necropotence* first saw print.

*Shivan Reef*, *Yavimaya Coast*, *Llanowar Wastes*, *Caves of Koilos*, and *Battlefield Forge* offer enemy colors of mana with no drawbacks -- as long as you don't mind a little pain. If you have any doubts about the power of these cards, you need only look at the top Extended decks from last year, which featured *Llanowar Wastes* and *Yavimaya Coast* in The Rock and blue-green madness, respectively. The mana consistency that these cards provide on the early turns more than offsets the pain they inflict. Rock players were more than happy to take one from their *Llanowar Wastes* in order to play an early *Pernicious Deed* against a beatdown deck. Later in the game they would have plenty of mana to choose from and would rarely take damage from these little powerhouses.



The Rock		
Pro Tour - Houston, November 2002 Extended, Darwin Kastle		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards	15 sideboard cards	
1 Dust Bowl	4 Cabal Therapy	1 Dust Bowl
7 Forest	1 Chainer's Edict	1 Faceless Butcher
4 Llanowar Wastes	4 Diabolic Edict	1 Genesis
7 Swamp	4 Duress	1 Haunting Echoes
4 Treetop Village	1 Living Wish	1 Living Death
23 lands	1 Naturalize	1 Masticore
4 Birds of Paradise	4 Pernicious Deed	2 Naturalize
4 Llanowar Elves	4 Vampiric Tutor	1 Planar Void
2 Spiritmonger	23 other spells	4 Ravenous Baloth
4 Yavimaya Elder		1 Spiritmonger
14 creatures		1 Stronghold Taskmaster

## Filter Lands

*Darkwater Catacombs*, *Mossfire Valley*, *Shadowblood Ridge*, *Skyshroud Expanse*, and *Sungrass Prairie* had the smallest impact on Constructed formats of any the cycles we are looking at today. For one thing they do not actually produce mana themselves. If you "filter" one mana through one of these lands, you will get two mana of friendly colors. The problem here is that you could conceivably get an opening hand with three lands in it and not be able to tap any of them for mana. Do you keep that hand, assuming you will draw a mana producing land? Do you mulligan? These are not questions you would face looking at three copies from any of the other cycles discussed here today.

*Darkwater Catacombs* saw play in a number of *Psychatog* and *Zombie/Upheaval* builds and *Sungrass Prairie* was found in a few *Mirari's Wake* decks, but this was not the most memorable cycle. While they are still available for use in Standard they have been completely overshadowed by the next block's entry into the pseudo-dual sweepstakes. To be fair, they have experienced a recent burst of deckbuilding participation thanks to the green-red archetype, which needs



as many red sources as it can get for **Violent Eruption** and **Blistering Firecat** while not compromising its ability to cast early green spells.

Red-Green		
Venice Last Chance Pro Tour Qualifier Top 8, Standard, Antonio Cassells		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		<b>Sideboard</b>
2 <b>Barbarian Ring</b>	4 <b>Call of the Herd</b>	2 <b>Caller of the Claw</b>
7 <b>Forest</b>	3 <b>Elephant Guide</b>	3 <b>Compost</b>
4 <b>Karplusan Forest</b>	4 <b>Firebolt</b>	3 <b>Ensnaring Bridge</b>
2 <b>Mossfire Valley</b>	4 <b>Violent Eruption</b>	2 <b>Krosan Reclamation</b>
4 <b>Mountain</b>	3 <b>Volcanic Hammer</b>	1 <b>Nantuko Vigilante</b>
4 <b>Wooded Foothills</b>		2 <b>Naturalize</b>
23 lands	18 other spells	2 <b>Pyroclasm</b>
		15 sideboard cards
4 <b>Basking Rootwalla</b>		
4 <b>Grim Lavamancer</b>		
4 <b>Llanowar Elves</b>		
1 <b>Nantuko Vigilante</b>		
2 <b>Phantom Centaur</b>		
4 <b>Wild Mongrel</b>		
19 creatures		

## And the Winner Is . . .

I have presented each cycle in chronological order; however, had I gone in ascending order of quality, I would still be discussing **Bloodstained Mire**, **Polluted Delta**, **Wooded Foothills**, **Flooded Strand**, and **Windswept Heath** last. This second series of fetch lands has been embraced by every Constructed format from Type 1 to Block Constructed.

The first cycle of fetch lands, in the *Mirage* set, had the same effects as those in the current cycle but they came into play tapped. The *Onslaught* cycle comes without that drawback and instead costs you 1 life to activate. They do not offer you the flexibility of the traditional pseudo-duals in that you are forced to pick one color over the other when you use the fetch land's ability but hopefully you will make an informed decision based on the mana you already have in play and the spells in your hand.

In addition to mana-fixing there are other benefits to the fetch lands. They serve to thin your deck, reducing the odds of drawing useless late-game lands, and to get you to threshold. They also allow you to play with fewer off-color lands in decks that are merely splashing a second or even a third color. With four **Wooded Foothills**, a Goblin deck can run a single forest to splash **Naturalize** or **Caller of the Claw** with five chances to get that forest into play.

I also love the tricks you can do with the fetch lands. There is of course the old **Land Tax** trick. Say you have a **Weathered Wayfarer** in play and you and your opponent both have the same number of lands. If one of your lands is a fetch land, you can sacrifice it and the "search for a land" ability goes on the stack. You can now respond by activating the Wayfarer because you have one less land while the fetch land's ability is on the stack. Conversely, if your opponent is showing an island and **Polluted Delta** and you are scared of **Counterspell**, you can wait for your opponent to sacrifice the **Delta** and then respond with an instant before that second island comes into play.



Turbo Oath		
Pro Tour - Houston, November 2002 Extended, Justin Gary		
<b>Main Deck</b> 60 cards		<b>Sideboard</b>
2 <b>Forest</b>	4 <b>Accumulated Knowledge</b>	2 <b>Dust Bowl</b>
7 <b>Island</b>	4 <b>Brainstorm</b>	3 <b>Engineered Plague</b>
4 <b>Polluted Delta</b>	4 <b>Counterspell</b>	2 <b>Gilded Drake</b>
1 <b>Swamp</b>	3 <b>Fact or Fiction</b>	2 <b>Masticore</b>
4 <b>Treetop Village</b>	1 <b>Foil</b>	2 <b>Naturalize</b>
2 <b>Underground River</b>	2 <b>Forbid</b>	2 <b>Palinchron</b>
4 <b>Yavimaya Coast</b>	3 <b>Force Spike</b>	2 <b>Powder Keg</b>
24 lands	2 <b>Intuition</b>	15 sideboard cards
	1 <b>Krosan Reclamation</b>	
2 <b>Cognivore</b>	2 <b>Living Wish</b>	
	1 <b>Mana Leak</b>	

2 creatures

4 **Oath of Druids**  
3 **Pernicious Deed**

34 other spells

Let me anticipate this week's mailbag and cut a number of you off at the pass. I have ignored the *Torment* cycle of **Tainted Wood**, **Tainted Peak**, **Tainted Isle**, and **Tainted Field**. I feel that they are a unique product of *Torment* and are not an attempt to replace the original dual lands. Due to their condition of producing colored mana only if you have a swamp in play, they are playable only in decks that rely almost entirely on swamps.

While we're talking mailbag, let me take a moment to apologize for my column two weeks ago. I claimed that there was no man-land that had stepped up to replace **Mishra's Factory**, **Faerie Conclave**, and the like. Many of you wrote in to ask why I had ignored **Nantuko Monastery**. Honestly, I plain ol' forgot about it. While I have rarely seen it used in tournament decks, I still should have, at the very least, mentioned it.

Next week, I will talk about the upcoming Regionals tournaments and how to catch your opponents behind the learning curve.

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*Brian David-Marshall has been involved in **Magic** since 1994 when he was violently shaken by someone searching for the game. He has organized tournaments, run a store, and is currently the Pro Tour Historian. His latest venture is [Top8Magic.com](http://Top8Magic.com), the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.*



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