

I have a confession to make: I love nonbasic land. I always have. The first **Magic** product I ever opened was a Beta starter that had a Bayou (and a Force of Nature), and I was instantly hooked. I still have that Bayou, though I've played with it so frequently that it's practically in tatters. Land is a necessary evil in the game; it fills two-fifths of each deck with cards that are kinda dull. My early decks featured a Demonic Tutor (creepy in its Faustian way), a Juzam Djinn (eye-popping in both size and art), and swamps (squishily ho-hum). And the injustice was that the swamps had to outnumber the Lords of the Pit and the Terrors. Why did I have to include more copies of the less-cool stuff?

Nonbasic lands to the rescue! Sure, a swamp or a forest is run-of-the-mill. But a Bayou? Exotic. Desert? Harsh. Island of Wak-Wak? Wacky. When new sets came out, I was always most excited to check the names of the new lands. I was entranced by the creativity, imagination, and flavor packed into the border-straddling dual lands. What new terrain could Wizards possibly come up with that was a cross between a swamp and a mountain? Hey, Lava Tubes -- it's a real geological phenomenon, it's filthy and underground, and it's created by lava. Good card? No. Cool concept? Absolutely. Over the years, I've been enchanted by other perfect bits of flavor. Gemstone Mine is flawless: you can dig out a few different colors, but then it's empty. Pine Barrens, besides echoing my favorite color combination since opening that Bayou, reminded me of my home state of New Jersey. Tinder Farm was brilliant: It's a bunch of trees (G), but when you chop them down (sac the land), you get a clear field (W) and firewood (R). More recently, I've been thrilled to have a hand in the naming process for the nonbasic lands from the *Odyssey* set forward. I especially like the new cycling lands. They're all quiet, deserted places (Forgotten Cave, Lonely Sandbar, and so on) that can just as easily be tapped for mana as they can slip away completely.

But reminiscing about flavory goodness doesn't help knock the opponent from 20 life to 0. It's rather unusual to start the deckbuilding process from the mana base (some would even say it's a terrible idea destined for failure), but that's what I did this week. I looked at the nonbasic lands available to me and tried to figure out how I could apply them best. Well, not *best*, but in the way that would amuse me the most. That's the same as "best," right? The most obvious things nonbasic lands are good at is producing different colors of mana. *Seventh Edition* gave us the pain lands, *Odyssey* gave us the filter lands, and *Onslaught* gave us the new fetch lands. They all enable a five-color deck. Luckily for us in this age of "tribal" deckbuilding, there's a creature type that spans all five colors. This tribe is an old favorite that was reintroduced with new abilities, its members work together quite well, and when you get to rare, the size increase is quite noticeable. That's right, everyone, the creature type I'm referring to is . . . Atogs!

## Rainbow Warriors

Most of this deck was a no-brainer: All the Atogs I could cram in there, plus as many cycles of multicolor lands as possible. I included a serving of artifacts and enchantments for them to munch on, and away we go. Although this deck can be quite painful to play, when it gets going, it's a blast. There's nothing quite like ditching your hand to a Phantatog, having your Lithatog eat all your lands, emptying your now-full graveyard for the Sarcatog, and dealing 20 damage in one all-out attack that leaves you victorious and completely permanentless except for the 'Togs. The most important cards in here may be the Howling Mines, which go a long way toward fixing your mana base and keeping your Atogs well fed. They have all those teeth for a reason: They're very, very hungry.

What's for Dinner?

## Standard-legal Atog deck

There's another cooperative five-color race, and that's Slivers. And there's another (less painful) way to get all colors of mana, and that's with the Tainted lands from the *Torment* set. The deck must have a heavy black base to pull this off, so I started with the black Slivers (which I professed to love last week). My initial goal was to pull off a five-color deck that used at least one of each Sliver. Though I successfully created a deck, I unsuccessfully created a deck that was capable of ever winning a game. The deck I eventually wound up with isn't going to win any Zvi statuettes at this year's Mowshies, but it's still fun. (Note to aspiring deckbuilders at home: If you want to build a Sliver deck, start with the Slivers -- not with the lands.)

Tainted Slivers

## Standard-legal Sliver deck

Landing Gear

Those decks are fine and all, but the land doesn't do anything besides make mana and occasionally get eaten. There's more forceful land out there -- land that takes an active hand in the proceedings! Land that stands up and demands to be heard! Land that's way too aggressive for a piece of real estate. But that's what makes them fun. I took a good long look at the *Legions* lands to see what ideas I could come up with, but I'm sorry to say I came up empty. But then I moved on to the *Onslaught* lands and got some ideas. Some of the tribal lands have clear uses. Contested Cliffs showed its stuff at Pro Tour - Venice last week, as did Goblin Burrows. Daru Encampment, Unholy Grotto, and Seaside Haven have pretty cut-and-dry uses built in. But I haven't seen anyone taking advantage of Wirewood Lodge. Sometimes it untaps a Wellwisher in a Limited game, but there don't seem to be many Elf abilities that warrant its use otherwise. Using it on a Llanowar Elves isn't the

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best use of five seconds of your life I can think of. But what if the Elf tapped to deal damage? That means Psionic Gift or, better, Arcane Teachings or Lavamancer's Skill. The Skill is best placed on a Wizard, though, so that means we need Elf Wizards like Tribal Forcemage and Bloodline Shaman. Once Wizards are in the picture, Riptide Laboratory should come in too. And since we already have some pingers, they'd be best backed up by more of them, and that naturally leads to more untappers too. Sometimes it's scary in my brain, but this is what it churned out.

Gas Food Lodging

### Standard-legal Elf Wizard deck

This deck is filled with fun tricks. Mistform Ultimus is another Elf Wizard, and Imagecrafter and Mistform Wall let you alternate between Wizard and Elf. You can use a Seeker of Skybreak to untap a pinger, then use the Lodge to untap the Seeker so you can untap the pinger again. Artificial Evolution can hack a Lodge so it untaps Wizards. Morph helps early mana problems in a three-color deck that features five lands that don't produce colored mana. And if you have enough mana in the late game, you can set up a recursive loop by playing a Tribal Forcemage, Willbender, or Echo Tracer face down, morphing it for its triggered ability, and bouncing it back to your hand with the Lab each turn. Having a repeatable mini-Overrun gives your Wizards a Jekyll and Hyde complex that I hear they enjoy.

### When Lands Attack!

The lands in that deck were proactive, but maybe still not proactive enough. Do you want a deck with lands that can actually get up and whomp your opponent over the head? Do you want a deck with four islands that you can tap for a Wrath of God? Do you want a deck that contains a land that can send itself to the graveyard and another land that can get it back for you? I don't know why you want that, but you got it. We're going through the looking glass here, folks. If you don't like what you see, just tell yourself that it's all a dream -- a twisted, scary-ass dream.

The *Judgment* set gave us three very interesting nonbasic lands, and two of them form the core of this next deck. The main route to victory comes by attacking with Nantuko Monastery. In order to do that, you need three things: white mana, green mana, and a bunch of cards dumped into your graveyard. Riftstone Portal, if it's been dumped into your graveyard, lets your lands tap for white and green mana. What an amazing coincidence! That lets the deck avoid those pesky plains and forests entirely, which is good, because all the best ways to fill the graveyard fast are blue. To fortify our nonbasic mana base, a couple of lands from the *Odyssey* set make guest appearances: Seafloor Debris, which can produce green or white mana in a pinch, is included more for its ability to send itself to the graveyard, and Cephalid Coliseum is included because we're already focused on card filtration and threshold. The alternate routes to victory are a few Terravores, which don't interact with your Wraths of God nearly as well as the Monasteries do, and a couple of Still Lives, which do. Plenty of blue spells let you find the cards you need both in your hand and your graveyard. (I'm thrilled to find a use for False Memories.) And Standstill can be played as early as possible on an empty board since you can get 4/4 first-striking creatures without ever playing a spell.

Under the Sea

### Standard-legal Nantuko Monastery deck

Of the decks I've created and playtested specifically for this column, this is one of my absolute favorites to play. It practically auto-loses to Withered Wretch, but there's no denying the subversive fun of tapping five islands to both play a 6/6 green trampler and activate a Monastery for an attack. Until next week, have fun with nonbasic lands.

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