

Designing the visual feel of *Ravnica's* basic lands. The Essence of Basic Land

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You might not think Mt. Rainier's National Park and **Magic's** basic land cards have anything in common, but you'd be wrong. Long before any sketches were drawn or paintings commissioned, *Ravnica's* concept illustrators were out exploring Mt. Rainier's many different types of terrain.



Why would I want to take artists who are supposed to be designing a city environment to a national park? The answer is mana. It's easy to understand how mana is tapped from traditional land cards, but the city-covered plane of *Ravnica* offered us some unique challenges. **Magic's** basic lands are normally landscapes, so how would it work if the landscapes were covered with architecture? Could a hulking foundry towering over the center of a city be called a "mountain"? I believed that the answer

was yes, if we could keep the *essence* of a mountain, and that this could also be applied to the other basic land types in *Ravnica*.

That kind of thinking was what our journey to Rainier National Park was all about. We were in search of the essence of the basic lands. I didn't want us to passively read about it in a book or look at photos of land. I wanted each artist to *experience* nature first-hand, to capture the spirit of each setting. I wanted them to be inspired with ideas for translating that spirit into concept designs for the new world we would be helping build.

First off we took in a view of this massive mountain from a distance but soon we found ourselves walking among the Grove of the Patriarchs, giant Douglas firs that were over twenty-five feet in circumference. These immense trees are estimated to be nearly 1000 years old.



Below you can see the artists absorbing all of the growth and power that comes from a forest.



During this process we noticed how the trees' roots would wrap around and even grow on top of other plants and boulders. We thought this could be translated to an architectural setting by having the trees' roots growing right on top of the buildings. Here you can see the concept sketch that these trees inspired, and one of the basic lands developed from that concept.



Next we went on a search for water. In particular, we watched how the streams flowed between the trees and ran off into waterfalls, as we wanted that quality of water to drive the feel of Ravnica's water systems. From this came the idea of creating massive reservoirs that would flow throughout the city via aqueducts and waterfalls, delivering water to the city's population. Below you can see the concept sketch these streams and waterfalls inspired, and one of the basic lands developed from that concept sketch.





During our exploring we came across some small caves that gave us the idea for swamps being the underground part of the city. Seattle's underground city became our inspiration. In 1889, a fire burned the entire city to the ground and a new city was rebuilt right on top of the old city. You can still visit this underground city and see the remains of these old shop fronts and bars from the past. This picture gives you a good feel for the place, where underground windows look out on abandoned, underground sidewalks.



This environment was the perfect catalyst for developing Ravnica's sewers and swamps. The first image below is a concept sketch, and the second is an actual land piece inspired by the concept sketch.





After visiting the mountains we felt that a massive foundry would be a good fit as a source of red mana. As you'll learn as you explore the new plane more, Ravnica's citizens have plenty of need for smelting ore to create weapons and armor for their armies.





The last major hurdle was the concept of "Plains." Plains, just by definition, are vast flat areas, which is pretty much the opposite of how gothic cities are laid out. Our early concepts tried to show flat rooftops, but that didn't really work out visually.



Still, we knew something with a plains feel needed to be toward the upper reaches of the city, because sunlight is such a major source of white mana. Then, while looking out across some building rooftops, we noticed that everything began to visually flatten out naturally as the eye moved toward the horizon line. Thanks to the laws of perspective we had discovered an environment which captured the spirit of the plains in this city environment.





One of **Magic's** defining features is its ability to recreate itself periodically, both strategically and conceptually. Even though Ravnica's landscapes don't look like the traditional basic lands you may have grown accustomed to, I hope this article has given you some new appreciation for how they still contain the spirit of each setting, even if they look different on the surface.

Finally, I want to take this chance to give credit and thanks to the original concept artists who were instrumental in creating this gothic fantasy setting.



From left to right, the artists you see pictured are Martina Pilcerova, Todd Lockwood, Tomas Giorello and Dan Scott (with me in the center). Thanks to each of you for all the great work!