

10 lands	3 Foil	2 Misdirection
	4 Force of Will	4 Submerge
	4 Gush	
3 Gaea's Skyfolk	4 Land Grant	
4 Lord of Atlantis	4 Sleight of Hand	15 sideboard cards
4 Merfolk Looter	4 Winter Orb	
4 Quirion Dryad		
15 creatures	35 other spells	

Though the more famous pre-Kibler and Rubin version of Miracle Grow was the **Werebear** version from Grand Prix – Sendai about a week later, the mana base and the legend of Miracle Grow began with Alan Comer at Grand Prix – Las Vegas.

Alan actually went undefeated on Day 1 only to miss Top 8 on tiebreakers, but that doesn't make this deck – its mana base in particular – any less significant. How fearless do you have to be, exactly, to be the *first* guy to play this deck? Jon Finkel and Pat Chapin will tell you that the limit of skill in Constructed only goes as far as it takes to copy, but Alan as the first? *Ten* lands? Comer has always been noted for his playing slightly fewer lands than other pros, but for this deck, he had to be positively Matt Murdock.

The reason this mana base worked was because Alan could “cheat” on early drops with **Land Grant** and **Gush**. It wasn't too hard to get two Islands if he started with one land, and that could set up the lethal **Gush / Winter Orb** combination. Sure, Alan might not have very many physical lands, but his opponent would not, for practical purposes, have many – or any – more than he did.

Ken Ho – Upheaval / Squirrel Nest		
Main Deck		Sideboard
60 cards		
13 Forest	4 Circular Logic	4 Aura Graft
9 Island	4 Roar of the Wurm	3 Moment's Peace
1 Tarnished Citadel	3 Squirrel Nest	3 Nantuko Blightcutter
	4 Standstill	2 Persuasion
23 lands	3 Upheaval	3 Still Life
	18 other spells	15 sideboard cards
4 Aquamoeba		
4 Arrogant Wurm		
4 Basking Rootwalla		
3 Werebear		
4 Wild Mongrel		
19 creatures		

Alan's deck was Extended feeding into Ken's *Odyssey* Block Pro Tour from about the same era. This mana base was both ingenious and horrifying. Most U/G Madness decks you see in Extended today have more Islands than Forests because of **Wonder** and such considerations, but Ken's deck from the pre-*Judgment* Block spot had more Forests to help his early game... an early game that received no help from automatic inclusion **Careful Study!**

The really unique element, of course, is **Tarnished Citadel**, a controversial card to say the least, but one that Ken needed to tap for both green and blue mana in the Top 8 in the finals to take Pro Tour – Osaka.

The capacity to play a scary or scoffed-at mana base is one thing, but what about tapping lands? Most people will recognize that you should – all things held equal, not facing **Wasteland** + **Crucible of Worlds**, let's say – tap Island before you tap **Tundra** or **Hallowed Fountain**; tapping a basic and leaving a dual land will give you more options, if only options to bluff. However, what about tapping “identical” mana? Is there a time when you would err one way rather than the other?

Here's a nod to my old buddy Zvi Mowshowitz and our dear departed “[The Play's the Thing](#),” onetime finest column in all of Dominaria:

You have four available mana (🌲🏝️🌳) from three lands: Forest, Island, and **Simic Growth Chamber**. You want to play **Coiling Oracle** this turn, and have a **Mana Leak** in hand. Now all things considered, which lands do you tap to play out the underrated and underplayed Snake Elf Druid?



This is actually a pretty easy problem. All things considered equal, you should tap the basics to play the **Coiling Oracle**. Why? Because the chances of your flipping a Karoo of some sort are probably higher than the chances that your opponent will point a **Ghost Quarter** at your existing **Simic Growth Chamber** the next turn!

A **Ghost Quarter** will rob your ability to play the **Mana Leak** even though you get to replace the lost Karoo with a basic of your choice. If you can expect uncounterable – or at least fairly-hard-to-counter – mana denial the next turn, it's probably worth the gamble to tap the **Simic Growth Chamber**, even though you are exposing yourself to a suboptimal possibility when that top card is revealed.

Now we come to the more complicated mana bases of Ravnica-enabled 60-card decks. Here is the deck my friend Josh Ravitz played at the [2006 World Championships](#):

Josh Ravitz – Firemane Reanimator		
Main Deck		Sideboard
60 cards		
4 Boros Garrison	4 Azorius Signet	4 Condemn
4 Flagstones of Trokair	2 Careful Consideration	4 Disenchant
4 Hallowed Fountain	4 Compulsive Research	2 Muse Vessel
2 Island	4 Demonfire	2 Repeal
1 Plains	4 Lightning Helix	3 Zur's Weirding
4 Sacred Foundry	1 Repeal	
4 Shivan Reef	4 Resurrection	15 sideboard cards
23 lands	4 Wrath of God	
	27 other spells	
2 Akroma, Angel of Wrath		
4 Bogardan Hellkite		
4 Firemane Angel		
10 creatures		

Tuning this mana base was actually pretty fun. You can plug the colored mana requirements into a spreadsheet and it will tell you how many lands you need of each color (or something like that), but present day technology will not give you precisely the mana base, considering the things you need to consider in order to build the optimal mana base.

The first consideration in putting this mana base together was to play four copies of **Flagstones of Trokair**. This nonbasic land is one of the best cards in Standard, and we were predicting Solar Pox to be a popular deck; there

is no better defense against **Smallpox** than **Firemane Angel + Flagstones of Trokair**. There are more white requirements than anything else, so there is no downside to playing the maximum number of Flagstones the way there may be in even a two-color deck like G/W Ghazi-Glare. Immediately after choosing to play those **Flagstones of Trokair**, adding four Sacred Foundries and four **Hallowed Fountains** is automatic; **Flagstones of Trokair** is a sort of **Flooded Strand** as well as a puncture-resistant plains proxy, so when you reach for your duals, you want the duals that the Flagstones can search up. We also want at least one basic plains (check!)... We'll get to that in a minute.



You can only play *so many* "shock" lands, so the deck has to err towards **Shivan Reef** rather than **Steam Vents**. You want a reasonable number of lands that come into play untapped without hurting you, just to run out your Signets early or make non-color-intensive plays like **Compulsive Research**.

Let's accept **Flagstones of Trokair** as a staple of the format that guides our initial decisions on dual lands. As we continue to balance the mana, how do we answer questions like, "What is the difference between **Azorius Signet** and **Azorius Chancery**, or from a mana balance standpoint, **Adarkar Wastes?**" and "What is the difference between a **Boros Garrison** and a **Battlefield Forge?**"

I had the idea that I wanted to play four to six Signets in my deck, along with four Karoos. Scanning the mana costs, it was obvious that **Boros** was the most important two-color combination. Initially I had all **Boros Signets** and **Boros Garrisons**, but there were other matters to attend. Obviously I wanted as many Boros-somethings as possible, so I went with the Garrisons. However, this deck really wants to hit **Compulsive Research** on turn three. The best play is probably turn two Signet, followed by **Compulsive Research** and a Karoo. The best way you can ensure this play is to make sure your Signet makes blue mana.

Careful Consideration is the next best card advantage spell, and is even better with **Firemane Angels**. Hitting **Careful Consideration** in this deck isn't hard, but it isn't automatic... A blue-producing Signet for especially the third-turn **Careful Consideration** is a bonus there, too... But beyond the internal color requirements, there is one more factor to consider:

Blood Moon.

Blood Moon is going to disrupt an awful lot of this deck's mana, but at least we are a Red Deck of sorts. However, we can prevent all-out disaster by balancing our mana properly. That one Plains? That card is part of the anti-**Blood Moon** (and, I suppose, anti-**Ghost Quarter**) "aggressive reaction" woven into this deck's design. The basic Islands give us access to blue as well as white mana (we don't need a basic Mountain because we'll have all the basic Mountains we can ever need under **Blood Moon**). Our blue-producing Signets, though? These two drops are a place where we can build value. The Signets should *clearly* be **Azorius**. **Azorius Signets** give us the ability to play essentially everything (most importantly **Wrath of God**, I'd wager).

Sometimes small splashes are harder to do well than three- or even four-color dedicated mana bases.

For example, I am working on a Mono-Blue UrzaTron deck (kind of a BlueTooth) update for Extended. One thing that came up early was wanting to deal with Affinity or perhaps Goblins. Blue doesn't have great – or at least quick – answers to the best of the swarm decks, but white sloughs them off like old skin cells. I didn't have a lot of space to play with white-producing mana sources, because 13 of my 23-25 lands come spoken for. I figured, though, that I might have room for four **Onslaught** search duals (which are good with my Tops anyway), one **Hallowed Fountain** main, and one **Hallowed Fountain** side. The automatic would be this:

- 1 Academy Ruins
- 4 Flooded Strand
- 1 Hallowed Fountain
- 5 Island
- 4 Urza's Mine
- 4 Urza's Power Plant
- 4 Urza's Tower

+ 1 Hallowed Fountain

After thinking about it, though, why is that best? You can make the argument that the sideboarded land should actually be a basic Plains, because you are siding it in when you bring in some kind of **Kataki** or **Sphere of Law** package and against swarm decks you don't necessarily want to be taking three damage when you can take one, but I didn't like that argument.

This mana base is almost strictly better:

- 1 Academy Ruins
- 2 Flooded Strand
- 1 Hallowed Fountain



- 5 Island
- 2 Polluted Delta
- 4 Urza's Mine
- 4 Urza's Power Plant
- 4 Urza's Tower

+ 1 Hallowed Fountain

Why is this so much better? Well, no matter what land you are searching for, it is always an Island. **Polluted Delta** can find **Hallowed Fountain** just as well as **Flooded Strand**. In addition to doing *the exact same thing* as **Flooded Strand** in this deck, **Polluted Delta** gives the deck a small measure of defense. You don't want to lose to a random **Pithing Needle** just because you opened on two sac lands. **Polluted Delta** lets you mix it up a bit. More importantly, though, you get to pretend you are 'Tog on the first turn. You might draw out a screwup if you can string the other guy along early. Swapping out two **Flooded Strands** for two **Polluted Deltas** might not seem like a very big decision, but if you want to play cool, different, and generally *less powerful* decks in tournaments (but still kick the teeth down the throats of the first tier), the only way you can accomplish that is by paying attention to the places where you can get an edge, possibly mislead the other guy, in order to bust them wide open and score a few extra wins.

It's Easter Egg Week, so I thought I'd close with a little-known Easter Egg from the annals of the Pro Tour, even if it doesn't have anything to do with understanding or getting an edge from your mana base... quite the opposite, in fact.



Mark Justice – Pro Tour I		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
60 cards	15 sideboard cards	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 City of Brass 4 Dwarven Ruins 1 Havenwood Battleground 4 Karplusan Forest 4 Mishra's Factory 3 Mountain 3 Plains <hr/> 21 lands <hr/> 0 creatures <hr/> 39 other spells	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Balance 1 Black Vise 1 Detonate 1 Earthquake 1 Elkin Bottle 1 Feldon's Cane 3 Fellwar Stone 3 Fireball 4 Howling Mine 4 Icy Manipulator 2 Incinerate 1 Ivory Tower 1 Jester's Cap 4 Lightning Bolt 2 Shatter 2 Stormbind 3 Swords to Plowshares 3 Winter Orb 1 Zuran Orb 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 Anarchy 1 Detonate 2 Eron the Relentless 2 Fountain of Youth 3 Pyroblast 3 Serrated Arrows 2 Shatter

A lot of people wonder why Justice's deck, which already had **Howling Mines** to draw extra cards, would deign to play a lonely **Elkin Bottle**. The reason is that a magazine had printed a review of *Ice Age* and declared **Elkin Bottle** unplayable. Justice, in an Easter Egg-like protest that would make sense only to those who knew about the review, played the seemingly misplaced Bottle in his Pro Tour I Top 8 deck!

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