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When a Cycle Isn't a Cycle

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Latest Developments
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Over the years, we've seen all manner of dual lands come and go. Alpha had the original—and most powerful—versions. **Tundra**, **Taiga**, and their ilk had basic land types and no drawbacks whatsoever. (When I played, we called the original duals "multi-lands." Did anyone else do that?) A couple years later, *Ice Age* introduced two more cycles—the perfectly balanced "pain lands" (**Adarkar Wastes**, **Sulfurous Springs**, etc.) that have become ubiquitous thanks to their many core set appearances, and the just-as-rare-but-about-one-tenth-as-good "depletion lands." (Click on the words "**Land Cap**" and recoil in horror.)



In the years since, cycles of lands with various drawbacks and of various power levels have come and gone, from *Invasion's* clean-but-underpowered "taplands" (like **Coastal Tower**), to *Onslaught's* fan-favorite "fetch lands" (like **Windswept Heath**)—themselves a tweak on a similar cycle from *Mirage* (like **Flood Plain**)—to the subtle power of *Time Spiral's* "storage lands" (like **Calciform Pools**).

The cycles each have their own little idiosyncrasies, and debates can be had on how useful each cycle is or which is the most powerful, but the fact is that cycles of dual lands are generally very, very boring. Once you've seen one card in the cycle, you can rattle off the text boxes of the other four (or nine). They emphasize function over form, and while they do nice things for sets and constructed environments, they're hardly pinnacles of Design's creativity.

In *Future Sight*, Mark Rosewater went out of his way to rectify that.

From the earliest days of design, Mark knew that he wanted a "mega-cycle" of dual lands in the set—five lands, each of one of the allied color pairs, each with a different mechanic that hints at a potential future cycle of such lands, which in turn hints at entire future sets and blocks.

I had my doubts initially. After all, to me, cycles of lands were something that were to be learned quickly and then filed away so that brain-space could be dedicated to the other cards in the set. When I play a game, I like knowing—quickly—what my opponent's lands are capable of. I know *Ravnica* duals are going to fix his mana essentially free of charge, and core set painlands are going to damage him from time to time. Simple. Why should we complicate things?

To arrive at the answer, one must first fully accept *Future Sight* and all of its rule-breaking quirks. The set is chock-full of things—including keywords, terminology, even *frames*—that appear on only one or two cards when they would normally appear on a dozen or more in a set that had more focus. The set is half mind-blowing trip through time, half idea audition. If you put a cycle of identical lands in the set, that cycle exists in *the present*, but if you include representative cards that look to be from five different cycles, then you have given players a look into potential *futures*. Normalcy has been put on the back burner.

That said, we didn't just let Rosewater do whatever he wanted! Some amount of development went into the cycle. Here are a couple from the design handoff that didn't make it:

```
Poisoned City
Land
T, Receive a poison counter: Add W or U to your mana pool.
```

That land is a lot more interesting in the context of the theoretical block from which it comes, a block where poison can be used both as an offensive weapon and as a resource. But outside of that block, it's just *really good*. There aren't any playable poison cards that may make you shy away from tapping this any fewer than nine times in a game.

```
Tainted Mine
Land
```



T: Add 1 to your mana pool.

T, Tap an untapped creature you control: Add BB or RR to your mana pool.

I don't have any notes in front of me, but if memory serves me correctly, this land was killed for being too *weak*. It bears a bit of similarity to *Urza's Saga's Thran Quarry*, a five-color land that required you to control a creature in order for it to remain in play. The problem is that you want your dual lands to work early in the game so that you can *play* your early creatures. It was unwise to play an early creature with the Quarry because if the creature was removed you'd lose the land as well, and it is more or less *impossible* to play an early creature with Tainted Mine as it doesn't give you the color you need until the creature is in play. On top of that, you have to tap the creature, which was almost never worth the investment.

Now let's look at some of the designs that showed more promise:

Grass Volcano

Land

T: Add 1 to your mana pool.

{R/G}, T: Add RG to your mana pool.

This particular hybrid-activated land was moved to black-red in development and made even better. After this weekend, if you haven't seen it at the [Prerelease](#), look it up in Gatherer. I'm sure you'll agree that it will see a fair amount of play.

Windswept Valley

Land

CARDNAME comes into play tapped.

T: Add G or W to your mana pool.

2, Sacrifice CARDNAME: Target player draws a card.

In development we found ways to alter this one so that it no longer comes into play tapped, but the basic idea of a land that "cycles from play" remains intact on the card we printed.

Finally:

Dirty Pond

Land

T: Add U to your mana pool. If you played a land this turn, instead add

B.


As you can see, that one didn't change at all:



An amazing land made even more amazing by the colors of mana it provides. On turn one, it can be tapped for black to play *Duress*, or left untapped, ready to play *Force Spike* on the opponent's turn. The fact that the color available on opponents' turns is *blue*—the color that most wants to play spells at that time—is a beautiful thing.



And just look at that card frame! Because of the high color saturation on the text boxes of futreshifted dual lands, some of them have white text and some of them have black! Talk about a weird cycle!

How is this card not *strictly better* than **Island**? As my example above illustrates, you can't tap the land for  on the turn you play it (as you have "played a land this turn." So, unlike **Island**, you can't play it on turn one and play **Sleight of Hand**, or play it on turn two and summon **Lord of Atlantis**.

The card will certainly create interesting play decisions. Need blue this turn? Better tap it before you play your land. Hoping to topdeck a black removal spell? Maybe you should hold an extra land just in case. All-in-all a great card that is more exciting as a one-of than any five-card cycle would be.

Remember, the worldwide [prerelease events](#) are this weekend! Get out there and get a good look at the "future" of **Magic**! I promise you won't be disappointed!

Last Week's Poll

What do you most often use as tokens?		
Dice	5715	31.9%
Face-down cards	5220	29.1%
Glass beads	2687	15.0%
Coins	1300	7.2%
Pro Player cards	726	4.0%
Other	621	3.5%
Homemade token cards	571	3.2%
Scraps of paper	474	2.6%
DCI Player Rewards tokens	276	1.5%
Toys/figurines	209	1.2%
Token cards made by other companies	133	0.7%
Total	17932	100.0%

Dice fared well; I'm glad I reran the poll. I hope to have some news on tokens *in the future*...

This Week's Poll

Which is your favorite style of card frame?

- Normal (post-*Eighth Edition*) frames
- Old frames / *Time Spiral* "timeshifted" frames
- Planar Chaos* color-shifted frames
- Future Sight* future-shifted frames

*Aaron Forsythe was a professional **Magic** player and Internet columnist prior to leaving Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to join Wizards of the Coast. His first duty here was Content Manager of this very website, a job that required him to do actual work as opposed to playing games all the time. So when a position opened in R&D, he jumped at the chance. He is now director of **Magic** R&D, and still plays **Magic** in his free time when he's not busy playing **Magic**.*



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