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# Basically Good Enough

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Latest Developments  
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I've been part of some interesting departmental discussions over the past year about lands—specifically about basic lands and their role in the game's big picture.

What would go wrong if we decided to print the following card?

```
[Green Land]
Land
T: Add G to your mana pool.
G, T, Sacrifice CARDNAME: Gain 1 life.
```

Let's talk power level. Is this card, overall, more or less powerful than a dual land like **Stomping Ground**? Is it more or less powerful than **Pendelhaven**, **Treetop Village**, or **Llanowar Reborn**? If the answer to each of those questions isn't "less," then it's at least close—Green Land appears to be within the acceptable power level of printable land cards. That is reason enough for some R&D folks to consider a card like this fine to print.

The problem I see with this card is that it is, in a vacuum, "correct" to replace four **Forests** with four of these is just about every **Magic** deck ever built. By "correct" I mean that it doesn't hurt you at all yet increases your chance of winning with the deck. How much does it need to increase your chances to be worth including? Anything measurably positive. Heck, replace the "G, T" activation with "12, G" and it still outperforms **Forest** in just about every green deck.

The camp in favor of this card points out that the phrase "just about every green deck" is not the same as "every green deck," and as long as it isn't "every," then there are still deckbuilding choices to be made, and hence it isn't unprintably better. The two cases in which someone would choose to include **Forest** over this card in decks are (a) the deck contains cards that care about having lots of **Forests** at your disposal, like **Blanchwood Armor** and **Baru, Fist of Krosa** or (b) the environment you play in is full of cards that are harsh on nonbasic lands, like **Detritivore** and **Wasteland**. It would be possible, the "for" camp argues, to print lands like these in a set full of both kinds of cards—those that love basic lands and those that hate nonbasics—to keep the decision-making intentionally high and to leave the question open as to whether Green Land is in all cases better than **Forest**.



While I'll concede that it is feasible to create theme decks as well as Block, Standard, and possibly even Limited environments for which Green Land vs. **Forest** is an interesting decision, most **Magic** games played across the world will not happen under such extreme conditions. Most green decks don't contain **Blanchwood Armor**, and for those players, it is correct to put four Green Lands in all their green decks.

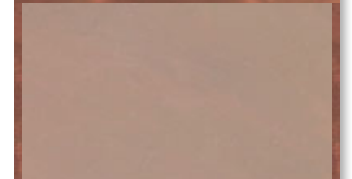
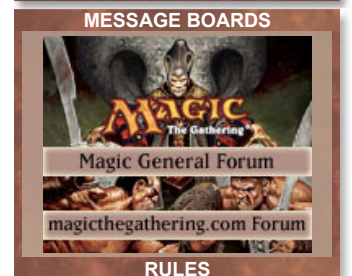
"So what?" you may ask. Fair enough, although I have two reasons why I believe it's bad to outmode **Forest**. One, and I believe this is just a "feel" thing, I like the sanctity of the basic land. There is something reassuring about the fact that, for any random deck you build, the correct way to get your mana to work is to use some number of basic lands. They are simple and friendly, and it's nice to not have to think too hard about some of the slots in the deck. Just about every other card you can think of replacing basic land with has some sort of drawback that gives you a reason to justify not running it. **Mishra's Factory** doesn't produce colored mana. **Wooded Foothills** makes you lose a life. **Treetop Village** comes into play tapped.

The second reason is that having a bunch of lands in play that do things other than tap for mana makes the game incredibly complicated. I enjoy the fact that often, when I glance over at my opponent's side of the board and see a slew of **Islands**, all I need to know is that he has three blue mana untapped. Sometimes, of course, it gets more complicated than that—one of the lands could be a **Faerie Conclave** and the other could be **Minamo**, **School at Water's Edge** with a tapped **Arcanis** lurking nearby, and suddenly I have to weigh all that stuff into my decisions, especially those involving combat. Some of that is okay, obviously, but when we start letting people replace basic lands in their decks with something better that has a board-complicating ability with no downside whatsoever, the simple **Island** and **Forest** will start to disappear from decks across all levels of play, and I don't think the game is in a better place because of it. Even snow lands feel like they fall on the wrong side of the line, at least in environments where the decks contain some portion of both snow and nonsnow (which may only be in **Coldsnap** limited). Having to verify which **Swamps** are snow and which are not before attacking into a **Rimebound Dead** is not one of **Magic's** highlights.

The last argument the "for" camp likes to use is that we'd only make cards like these once, or at the very least once in a while. It would take a long time for **Forest** and **Island** to become obsolete. Well, going down that path at all seems bad to me; I like that basic lands are often the correct choice, both in casual play and high-level



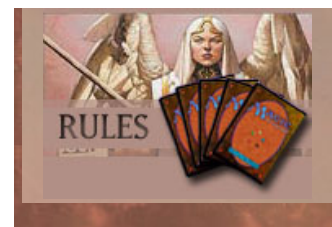
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Constructed. I wouldn't like being in a world where basic lands—the cards you own the most of—are just for noobs and specific narrow decks.

So even though there has been somewhat of a push in R&D to make lands that are for all intents and purposes strictly better than basic lands, I doubt it'll happen on my watch.

That said, I like powerful lands. I enjoy designs that come as close as possible to being better than basic lands without crossing the strictly-better line. [Pendelhaven](#) and [Flagstones of Trokair](#) are two that I particularly love. At first glance there seems to be virtually no cost to including these cards in your decks, yet the "legendary" drawback turns out to be significant enough that not every deck running [Plains](#) is running four [Flagstones](#), and not every deck running [Forests](#) is running even a single [Pendelhaven](#) (I was looking at the [Valencia PTQ decklists](#) when I typed this), so they can hardly be considered strictly better. Both shine in decks designed to take advantage of what they have to offer—[Pendelhaven](#) wants a lot of 1/1 creatures, and [Flagstones](#) wants ways to sacrifice your own lands. But in decks without any of those tricks at your disposal, the upside goes away, leaving just the "legendary" downside (by which I mean, on top of not wanting to include extra copies in your own deck, you run the risk of having an opponent play one as well, which wipes both copies out). Sometimes this might benefit you, but sometimes it won't; it is that variance that makes it a net negative. Of course, with [Flagstones](#) it is less severe than with [Pendelhaven](#), as you get to replace the [Flagstones](#) with a [Plains](#), but even having your land come into play tapped occasionally instead of untapped is bad enough. Mike Flores talked about legendary lands and deckbuilding at length [here](#).



So expect to keep seeing stuff like legendary, "comes into play tapped," and "deals 1 damage" / "lose 1 life" on utility lands. No, those aren't the cleanest or the most powerful cards in existence, but they play well enough and give everyone sufficient customizability in their deckbuilding without screaming out an obvious answer. And they let us preserve something that I think is important—sometimes the simplest choice is the best one.

## Last Week's Poll

What interests you the most about the Magic Invitational?		
The prize cards the competitors submit	2421	44.0%
The wacky formats	1015	18.4%
The decks the competitors play with	849	15.4%
Nothing	743	13.5%
The players themselves	477	8.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>5505</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## This Week's Poll

Do you agree with R&D's current direction regarding lands?

- No, I think you could make lands even better than you do now, possibly by making cards strictly better than basic lands.
- Yes, things are in a good place now.
- No, lands are currently too powerful; I'd like to see basic lands be more relevant more often.

Submit my Vote

*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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