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It's Not Easy Being Green



Mark Rosewater

The most misunderstood color

Welcome to Green Week! This week we'll be exploring the color of nature and growth. This, by the way, is the first of five theme weeks dedicated to the colors of **Magic** (expect to see future color weeks later this year and early next year).

As I've mentioned in previous columns, I believe one of Richard Garfield's most innovative creations when he made the game of **Magic** was the color wheel. The color wheel is the one thing that ties together all the flavor and mechanical aspects of the game. To me, it is the heart of **Magic**. As such, I have spent a great deal of time understanding how the color wheel works.

Many months ago, I wrote an article explaining why the colors hate one another ("[Hate Is Enough](#)"). This was my first attempt to introduce an in-depth view of the color wheel. Today, I'm going to continue by focusing on the flavor and philosophy of a particular color. Being that it's Green Week, I thought it best to start with green.

The Wheel Keeps On Spinning

About two years ago, R&D decided to put the resources together to study the color wheel. We collected all the relevant people and began a methodical study of the colors and their relationships. The first thing we did was to define each of the five colors. We asked the following questions:

- What does the color care about? What is its end goal?
- What means does the color use to achieve these ends?
- What does the color care about? What does the color represent?
- What does the color despise? What negatively drives the color?
- Why does the color like its allies and hate its enemies?
- What are the color's greatest strength and biggest weakness?



This screen is used to explain green to new players on [playmagic.com](#).

To help with this, we created a color wheel on one of the walls in R&D. Anyone was allowed to cut out pictures (mostly characters) and put it where they felt it belonged on the wheel. If enough people disagreed it was moved. This exercise was very interesting. (And I'll talk about some examples later on.) We started getting a much better definition of the colors and began building consensus. And we learned something important about green: it was the hardest color to understand. Everyone seemed to be on the same page about white or black, but everyone had a slightly different opinion of green. This meant that we took extra time to understand green and I will share our conclusions with you today.

What does the color care about? What is its end goal?

Each color's view of the world is heavily influenced by the thing it

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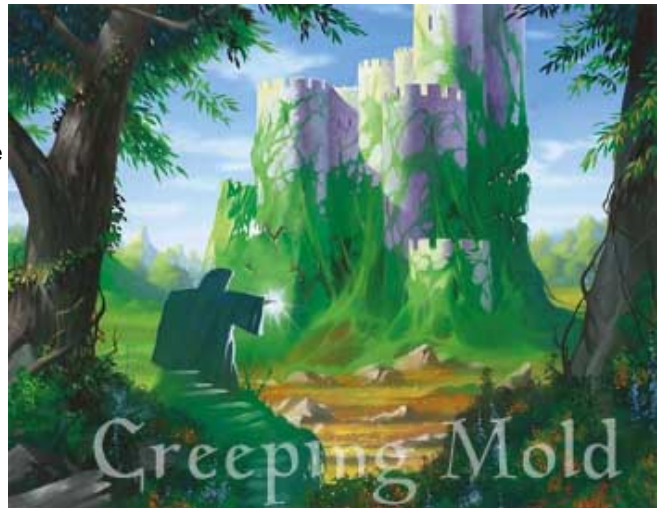
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values most. What does green value most? Nature. The way green sees it, the world has gotten it right. There is no force more powerful, more peaceful, or more elegant than nature. Its end goal is simply to let the natural way evolve. Green, in its heart, wants nothing more than to sit back and watch life unfurl around it. Thus, green's ultimate goal is growth. Green would be happiest in a world where nature has been allowed to run rampant.

The growth theme runs rampant throughout green. Green has the ability to temporarily enlarge its creatures with spells like **Giant Growth** and **Overrun**. Long term green has numerous spells that can permanently enlarge creatures with

spells like **Invigorating Boon** or **Predatory Hunger**. In addition, green's growth is seen through its token generators such as **Kamah's Summons** and **Centaur Glade**. Green also has many creatures like **Maro** or **Terravore** that naturally grow over time. Green's growth can also be seen in its ability to speed the amount land/mana available to the player with spells like **Rampant Growth** or **Wild Growth** (notice how often the term "growth" shows up?) Mechanically, green overwhelms the opponent by constantly producing more and more resources and thus more and more threats.



The newer art for Creeping Mold clearly shows green's pro-nature pro-growth attitude.

What means does the color use to achieve these ends?

Unfortunately for green, not everyone shares its views. As such, green makes it its mission to protect the natural way. Green accomplishes this by tapping into the awesome power of nature, both its primal forces and its menagerie of creatures. Green values the natural abilities of its champions. As such, it relies heavily on its instinct and on the natural symbiosis found in nature. This makes green hard to predict and allows it the ability to overwhelm its opponents with sheer number.

This rationale is why green is the "creature color." This is reflected numerous ways in the game. First, green has more creatures than any other color. Just look at the common cards of *Onslaught*. Green has sixteen common creatures. White has thirteen, black twelve, blue eleven, and red ten. Green also has proportionately larger creatures, especially at common. Most importantly, green has the most efficient creatures from a mana standpoint. In general, you get more for your mana when you play a creature in green.

What does the color care about? What does the color represent?

Green fights not for an ideal but rather for a way of life. As such, green is the most spiritual of the colors (although not the most religious – green leaves that to white). Green stresses the importance of the system over that of the individual. Balanced between the order of white and the chaos of red, green embraces the duality of nature. At times nature is gentle and loving. At other times it is fierce and harmful. While every other color fights to change the world, green battles to keep it the same.

Green represents the following things:

- Life (birth)
- Growth
- Nature
- Reality (as contrasted to illusion)
- Community
- Interdependence
- Spiritualism
- Instinct
- Animals

What does the color despise? What negatively drives the color?

Green cannot abide by those that don't respect nature and the natural way. It sees these usurpers as something dangerous and thus tries to destroy them. If you aren't with it, you're against it. Green is a valuable friend but an even more dangerous enemy. Green believes deeply in its cause and shows no mercy.

This dislike of the unnatural is where green's hatred of artifacts comes from. This is actually one of the important shifts that came about during our study of the color wheel. As we examined the blue-green conflict we realized how much of green is defined by its hatred of things artificial. Naturalize in *Onslaught* is a first move towards centering artifact destruction in green. In the past, green has had artifact hate but it's always ranked third behind white and red. This is changing. Green is mechanically taking the role that it flavorwise has always had. You create something artificial and green will destroy it.



Crumble was an early spell that exemplified green's dislike of artifice.

As a quick note to those of you that feel we are shorting white yet again: The color pie reshuffle is going to be a long evolving process. You cannot judge the overall effort by looking at a single piece of the move. The end result will be an evening of the colors. White and red are currently low while blue and black are currently high. Trust me that in the end this will all even out. We will not be forsaking the utility of any of the colors. Also, I think it's important to stress that these changes are not being made thoughtlessly. We are spending a great deal of time to do this right. Hopefully today's column will go to show how much effort we took before we chose to shift artifact hatred to green.

Why does the color like its allies and hate its enemies?

In white, green sees a fellow color that understands the importance of the group. The big picture is more important the fate of a single individual. Also, white has a very peaceful, life-friendly attitude that it can relate to.

In red, green sees a fellow color that understands the importance of instinct (although in red its much more emotion-based). Like green, red has a feral side that understands that at times actions are called for when words will not suffice. Red also has a destructive element that green can relate to.

In blue, green sees an enemy that does not respect the value of nature. Blue wishes to tear down all that is natural to construct its own artificial world. Blue has no respect for the importance of instinct choosing to value knowledge over one's gut. Blue looks to its cold impersonal future always forsaking the warmth of its past. Green must preemptively destroy blue before it destroys green.

In black, green sees a selfish, selfish color. Green understands the importance of the cycle of life. As such it respects the role of death. Black, on the other hand, uses death unnaturally as a tool for its own means. If green is to protect nature, it must stop black before it kills all living things for its own twisted agenda.

What are the color's greatest strength and biggest weakness?

Green, through its tie to the earth, has an armada of creatures at its beck and call. It taps into a primal force that grants it great power. The downside to green's way of life is that it relies completely on its instinct to gauge danger. Green is fundamentally trusting. With subtlety, its enemies can exploit this naivety to its own ends.

This plays into green's greatest weakness, its inability to deal with creatures. Green has no qualms with destroying artificial things. It will blow up artifacts or enchantments. It will even sever opponent's ties to their mana by destroying their land. But it just cannot bring itself to destroy the opponent's creatures. There are a few exceptions, but in general, green does not kill other living things.

Little Green Guys

I talked above about R&D's cut-and-paste color wheel. I thought I would end this article by showing you some of the characters we believed were primarily "green" in nature. The idea being if we made **Magic** cards of these characters, they would be green.

King Kong – This one's pretty straight-forward. Big ape driven by instinctual needs.

Godzilla – Same basic idea as King Kong.

Tarzan – A man raised by apes. As Lord of the Jungle, Tarzan protects his domain with use of his animal friends.

Swamp Thing – A nature elemental, this supernatural creature protects the natural order. Oh yeah, and his body is comprised of plants.

Winnie the Pooh – For starters, he's a bear. And he's driven by his constant desire to fill his tummy.

Wolverine – A feral character with heightened senses that functions highly on instinct. He is known to often go into a berserker rage. He even has an animal name.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer – The "chosen one" imbued with special supernatural powers. Buffy is a hunter who prowls at night finding her prey. She has an animalistic side that constantly sways her from the strict rules set by the Council of the Watchers (a very white organization).

How Green Was My Valley


And that is what I have to say about green. In future theme weeks I'll explore the flavor and philosophy of the other four colors.

Join me next week when I revisit some of my favorite moments working in R&D.

Until then, may you know the joy of overrunning the opponent with a horde of green critters.

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