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Making Magic Monday, February 3, 2003

The Great White Way

Is white the "good" color?



Mark Rosewater

Welcome to White Week! [Several months ago](#) we dedicated a week to green. I promised that this would be the first of five such "color" weeks. This week is the second in the series, white. As I did last time, I'm going to spend my column focusing on the flavor and philosophy of the color in question.

As I stated in my green column, I believe the heart of the game of **Magic** rests on the color wheel. This unique innovation of Richard Garfield's is the item that ties the game mechanics and flavor together. (Yes, function and flavor can coexist.) Just as we have rules gurus that study the rules, I am one of the flavor gurus that has spent a great deal of time studying the flavor of the different colors. Today, I hope to give you some appreciation for the complexity and richness of the color white.



Who Feels Like Pie?

During our work on the color wheel, we asked the following questions about each of **Magic's** five colors:

- 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 is the color's greatest strength and biggest weakness?

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

Each color's philosophy is anchored in what it wants. Each color strives to make the world in the image it believes it should be. That said, what does white value most? Harmony. White wants a world where everyone gets along. White enjoys community. White wants what is best for the whole. White looks out for everyone. White would be happiest in a utopian society where everyone shares and cooperates with one another. White's ultimate goal is peace.

I'd like to make a quick aside about white and the concept of "good." Good and evil are labels used by people to signify whether something promotes their values or attacks their values. Something that promotes the values you believe in is good. Something that attacks the values you believe in is evil. Each color in **Magic** believes strongly in the thing it seeks. Therefore it sees itself as good and the enemies that oppose it as evil.

Many humans share some global beliefs (the taking of a human life is wrong, for example). Some of white's tenets line up with some of these universal human beliefs. Therefore white is sometimes seen as the color of "good." Ah, but white is neither inherently good nor evil. White, as well as every other color in **Magic**, will do things that can be labeled both "good" and "evil," and even that might not be consistent from person to person. Preservation of life is very white. Most of you would probably classify that as "good." Fascism is also very white. Most of you would probably classify that as "evil."

I mention this because I believe it's important to separate the white-black conflict from good versus evil. Morality versus amorality. Light versus dark. Purity versus corruption. The white/black conflict takes on many shades, but "good versus evil" is far too subjective to use properly. Let's take one of the elements of the white/black conflict, the rights of the group versus the rights of the self. This conflict pits socialism versus capitalism. Capitalism is the black side of the argument. Is capitalism inherently evil? I don't think so. (Although I know there are those that would disagree with me.) I'll talk more about black (including its "good" side) when we get to Black Week.

What means does the color use to achieve these ends?

White is looking not just to help itself but to help the entire world. This is a daunting task. How can it not just create but also maintain peace? The answer is through structure. By making strict rules and laws, white can ensure that things stay in control. White extends these laws to two distinct areas.

First is by moral laws. White believes that morality is cut-and-dried. There is right and there is wrong. Individuals are morally obligated to do right. But white takes it even further. Individuals are also morally obligated to stop those that do wrong. White's fervor in this area leads white to use religion.

The second of white's "tools" is civil laws. These are rules set up to make sure that the individual does not upset the greater good of the group. White believes that the good of society is more important than the rights of a single individual. The laws white creates help ensure that the group is protected. White's fervor in this area leads white to use politics and the judicial system.

This desire to protect and create rules defines much of white's mechanics. White's defensive nature can be seen throughout the color: **life gain**, **healing**, **damage prevention**, **attacker removal**, **protection**, **defensive enchantments**, **enchantment removal**, etc. In the past year, white R&D has taken a look at expanding white's pie by finding more mechanics that tie into white's core flavor. The richest area proved to be the "making rules" part of the color. As such, we've moved both **taxing** (**Propaganda**-type spells where you stop your opponent from doing something unless he pays a price) and rule-setting enchantments (global enchantments that shift the rules and restrict how players can play, such as **Rising Waters**) into white. This shift began subtly in **Onslaught** and will be ramping up in upcoming sets.

Another defensive part of white is its reliance on equality. White has the ability to reset the board so that both sides have an equal playing ground. This is why spells like **Wrath of God** (and yes, even **Armageddon**) are flavored in white. In addition, white has an aggressive side. White proactively punishes the rule-breakers. White can use its organizational skills to build an army. Its individual pieces are small (thus its reliance on small creatures), but together they form a united whole. Many of white's creature abilities (first strike, "rangestrike" such as **Crossbow Infantry**, damage prevention, creature boosting such as **Angelic Page**, etc.) help its creatures work more efficiently together. In addition white has spells, such as **Glorious Anthem**, which are at their best boosting an army of small creatures.



White wins the game by controlling the environment. It takes a defensive stance and then uses the tools at its disposal to stop the threats of the enemy. Once the threats are contained, white's army can then win the day. From time to time, white will use its aggressive attack as a preemptive defensive maneuver. (This strategy is popularly known as "white weenie.")

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

Caught between the nature of green and the nurture of blue, white is all about balance. White understands the importance of valuing the past but also sees the importance of planning for the future. More than any other color white makes use of symbolism. In addition, white is the color of civilization. As such, the list of things it represents is slightly longer than the other colors:

Order	Purity	Religion	Civilization
Structure	Law	Honor	Construction
Morality	Politics	Courage	Optimism
Defense	Strategy	Chivalry	Loyalty
Cooperation	Military	Self-sacrifice	Honesty
Light	Organization	Community	Medicine

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

White lives by its laws. As such, it cannot tolerate those that do not follow them. White views such disobedience very severely. The message white communicates is: "Break my laws and you will suffer."

This is where white's aggressive side comes from. White believes that it has a moral and civil right to stop what it considers to be evildoers. White sees this kind of an attack as being proactively defensive. If white does not stop them now, they will come later to hurt white's way of life.

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

In green, white sees a fellow color that understands the importance of community. That the good of the whole is more important than the good of the individual. Also, unlike blue, white seems capable of living an agrarian life that blends civilization with nature.

In blue, white sees a fellow color that understands the importance of restraint. Both white and blue value planning and discipline. Blue realizes the need for rules and has the patience to think long-term.

In red, white sees an enemy that does not respect civil laws. Red does what it wants whenever it wants creating chaos. This flies in the face of the order white so desperately craves. If red had its way, anarchy would reign over the land. If white is to have its peace, red must be destroyed.

In black, white sees an enemy that does not respect moral laws. Black selfishly promotes the needs of the individual over the needs of the group. And there is nothing more dangerous than those willing to put their own personal needs in front of anything else. Black is a dangerous cancer that must be destroyed.

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

White's greatest strength is its ability to create and enforce laws. If white can make you play by its rules, the opponent doesn't stand a chance. The downside to this structure is inflexibility. White does not have the ability to quickly adapt as it's very set in its ways. In addition, white is so focused on the group that is often loses sight of the individual.



White Knights

During R&D's discussion on the Color Wheel, we cut out pictures from magazines and taped them on a giant Color Wheel on the wall to demonstrate how we saw the colors. This section proved to me the most controversial during Green Week so, of course, I had to do it again. Here's what we considered to be white characters:

Superman – Known in comics circles as the “Boy Scout.” Superman always, *always* plays by the rules. He has a very moral center. In addition, he feels one of his major roles is to protect others. All of these behaviors are very white.

King Arthur – Arthur's main agenda was helping and protecting his subjects. He, too, had a strong moral code that guided his actions. And he made great use of structure to build and maintain this protection.

Marge Simpson – One of the fun things we did was trying to figure out where all of the Simpsons went. After some debate we ended up putting Marge in white. She is the moral center of the family. She and Lisa seem to be the only ones ever guided by conscience. She takes it upon herself to provide structure for her family. And she is protective to the point of being self-sacrificial.

Captain Jean-Luc Picard – The Federation is very much a white organization. It has a moral center and loves its rules. Picard is a good soldier for the Federation. He has a strong moral compass and he leads his people very much by the rules laid out before him. Picard enjoys structure. So much so that one of his pastimes is archeology, studying the structures of other civilizations.

The Villain from *Watchmen* – SPOILER – If you haven't read *Watchmen* (the best comic series of all time – my opinion, but I'll stand by it), stop reading this section. Instead, go out and buy a copy of the graphic novel. It's very good. Okay, the rest of you have all read *Watchmen*, correct? If not, this is your last chance not to ruin it. Ozymandias is the perfect example of a white villain. His motives are very pure. He believes he is taking actions that will help the world at large. And he is more than willing to sacrifice a few for the greater good of the whole. This proves that white characters are not always good. What separates white villains from black villains (remember I'm talking the **Magic** color wheel here) is that black villains know they're doing evil while white villains believe they're doing good.

A Paler Shade of White


And there you have white. In future “color weeks” I'll be exploring blue, black and red.

Join me next week when I do the thing that I was supposed to do last week.

Until then, may you know the joy of making your opponent play by your rules.

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