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Seeing Red



Mark Rosewater · Making Magic
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Welcome to Red Week! ...Finally! This is the fifth in a series of theme weeks dedicated to the five colors of **Magic**. (The previous four weeks were "[It's Not Easy Being Green](#)", "[The Great White Way](#)", "[True Blue](#)", and "[In the Black](#)"). If you haven't read them yet I strongly urge you to take a peek.

How About Another Slice of Pie?

During each of the color-themed weeks, I use my column to explain the flavor and philosophy of that color. To do this, I am using a series of questions created by the flavor gurus in R&D when we were fleshing out the color wheel. Here are the 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 is the color's greatest strength and biggest weakness?

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

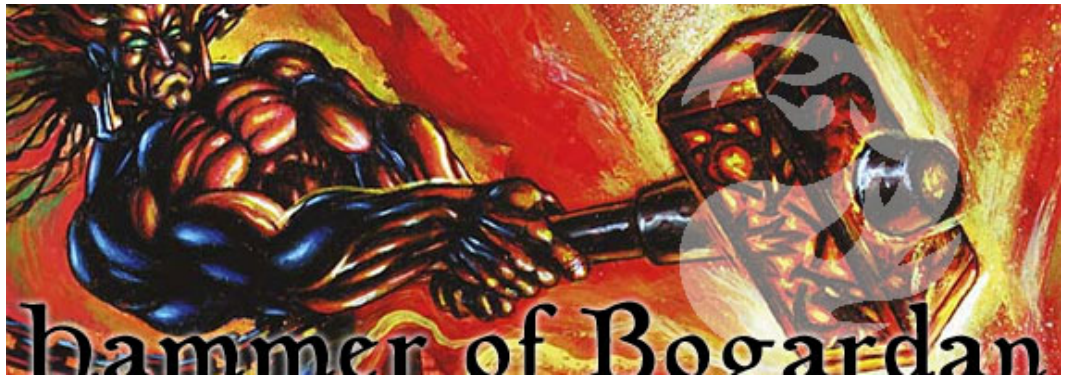
Each color's philosophy revolves around how it sees the world. So how does red see the world? What does red value? To red, life is the ultimate adventure. Red feels that living life to its fullest means taking advantage of every opportunity. And what better means to drive this goal than one's own emotions? Red acts on its gut and follows its heart. If red is happy, it celebrates. If red is sad, it cries. If red is angry, it smashes things. Life is very simple for red. It does what it feels.

To accomplish its goal, red uses action. If something is preventing you from doing what you want, knock it out of the way. If it comes back? Eh, blow it up. Red is a big proponent of force. If you want something to change, make it happen. Not later, now!

While on the surface red's goals might seem similar to black's there are some important differences. Black's desire to do what it wants is driven by a quest for power. Black doesn't care if others are restricted. As long as it as an individual can do what it wants, black is happy. Red, on the other hand, believes that everyone has the right to do what it wants. Red will act to break down barriers that don't necessarily affect it personally merely because it doesn't like their existence.

In addition, while black is very solitary, red can be very social. Red follows its emotions. These emotions include love, lust, camaraderie, and friendship. Red cares about others. At least the ones to which it has some emotional ties. And red will go to great lengths to help or protect its loved ones. This doesn't mean that red isn't somewhat selfish. Emotions, by their very nature, do put one's own needs first, but it does mean that red at times will think about others.

In the end, red's ultimate goal is freedom. Red wants everyone free to act however they wish. And red is more than willing to take action to ensure that this happens.



What means does the color use to achieve these ends?

Each color bends its magic towards its goals. Red wants quick, physical answers. If something is preventing red from getting what it wants, red wants the ability to easily remove the obstacle. As such, red's magic is very destructive in nature. Direct damage, artifact destruction, and land destruction all tie into this theme. They are red's blunt implement of action. Note that this is the reason for red's inability to deal with enchantments. Enchantments aren't tangible thus red doesn't know how to blow them up.

The second major trait that shows up in red magic is red's short-term thinking. Emotions are inherently impulsive and thus very "in the moment". As such, red tends to act now and not worry about the later ramifications. This means that red is willing to get short-term gain at the cost of long-term vulnerability. Red, for example, is the color most willing to throw away resources to get its spells off sooner. Red is king of fast mana (defined as cards that produce one time bursts of mana such as [Seething Song](#)). Red has cheap creatures with big drawbacks. Of all the colors, red is clearly the color most invested with winning quickly.

Third, red tends to embrace randomness. This is partly a response to its hatred of structure and partly because red is prone to taking big risks. This is why coin flipping and other highly risky mechanics show up in red. In addition, this is why red likes spells that create chaos.

Finally, red has a mischievous side. While all the other colors tend to be very serious in achieving their goal, red understands the value of having fun. And it enjoys chaos. So red likes to use its magic to mess up other mages' magic. It likes to make spells not do what they're supposed to. This was the area embraced by R&D when we redistributed the color wheel. Anything that temporarily messed things up was moved into red. Long-term manipulation was kept in blue. [Deflection](#) became [Shunt](#); [Ray of Command](#) became [Threaten](#); etc., etc.

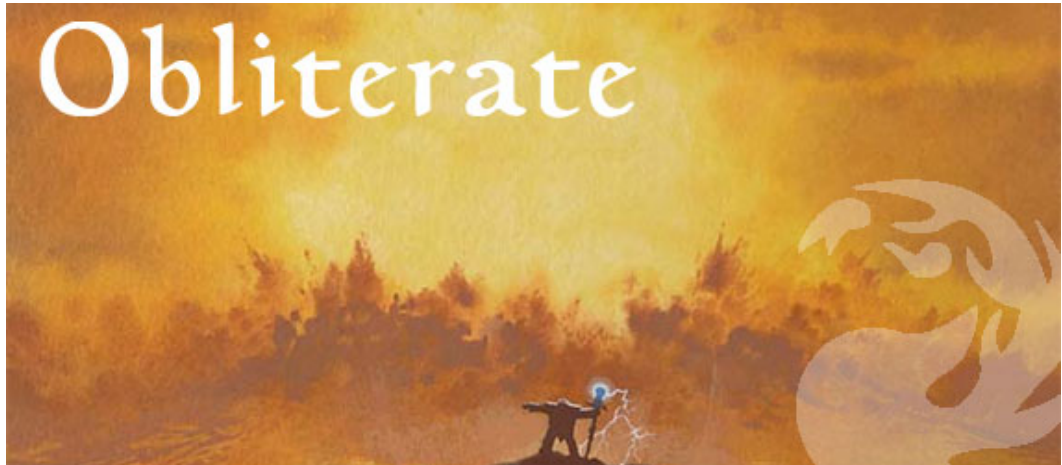
A lot of casual players gravitate to red because it's the one color that's simply trying to have fun. It doesn't require too much deep thought or careful planning. Play creatures, attack, blow things up. Just the way red likes it.

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

Red cares about making itself (and those it cares about) happy. Red wants to just live its life without interference from anyone. To accomplish this task, red harnesses the power of its emotion to do things that others, kept in check by different restrictions, are unwilling to do. As such, red represents the following things:

- Emotion (particularly the highly fueled ones such as Aggression, Rage, Passion, Fury, etc.)
- Impulse
- Violence
- Brutality
- Might (Solving Problems Through Brawn)
- Destruction
- Chaos
- The Elements of Fire & Earth (and the related destructive natural elements - Lighting, Fire, Earthquakes, Mudslides, Sandstorms, etc.)
- Fighting
- Military
- Randomness
- Spontaneity

Gambling
Hedonism
Barbarism



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

Red hates anything that tells it that it can't do what it wants. Particularly rules. Red hates rules. Hates, hates, hates them. Why is someone else telling red it can't do something? And in writing no less! This has led to red hating structure in general, because structure leads to rules.

In addition, red dislikes anything that devalues the importance of its emotions. Red understands that its feelings are the core of its being. Anything that dismisses that is treated as a personal attack.

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

“Less talking. More smashing.”

Red hates rules and structure. That's what white lives for. If white has its way, red wouldn't be able to do anything it wanted to. The answer for red is simple. Destroy white before it's able to make any more stupid rules.

If there's anything red hates as much as rules it would be thinking. Thinking causes nothing but problems. And blue does a lot of thinking. But it gets worse. Not only does blue value thinking, it devalues feeling. If blue had its way, no one would be aloud to express any emotion. Luckily, the solution to blue is the same as it is for white. Blow 'em up!

Black also enjoys having the freedom to do what it wants. And it too sees the value of destruction. If only black could learn to be a little more impulsive and think a little less.

Green understands impulsiveness. Sure, it calls it instinct, but whatever. Green does what it wants to do. Green's only flaw is its desire to occasionally put the needs of others ahead of itself. Friends and loved ones red could understand, but green will do this for creatures it doesn't even know.

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

Red's greatest strength is its ability to act quickly and overwhelm the opponent. In addition, it's good at “blowin' stuff up”. Plus, its unpredictability makes it a dangerous foe. The downside of red's approach is that it gets itself in trouble if its quick strike doesn't work. Red doesn't tend to have an “end game”. If red's opponents can survive its initial onslaught, red's usually in big trouble.



In the Red

As I discuss each color, I've been brining up what I consider to be the most relevant issue of that color. For red, I'd like to talk a little bit about how I believe red is the most misunderstood color. It's not that people's take on red is wrong. It's just very narrow. Yes, red likes destruction. Yes, red enjoys blowing things up. Yes, red is capable of getting very angry. But this is only one facet of red. And it leads to some false assumptions. Let's talk about some of these:

Red is stupid – Yes, red is not the thinking color. But this doesn't mean red is unintelligent. Red is emotional. Red is short-sighted. Red is impulsive. But none of these are mutually exclusive of intelligence. Red can (and does) have some very bright people. Both Tanhgarth and Starke from the Weatherlight Saga, for example, were intelligent red characters.

Red is a bully – Because **Magic** is a game about dueling, the cards tend to show off the aspect of the colors that lend themselves towards combat. For red, that means playing up the more aggressive emotions such as anger. This makes red seem like a big bully. And to be fair, it often is, but red does have many other less aggressive components. Red, for instance, is the color of passion and drive. Red is the home to most styles of art and poetry. Red has a very gentle side. It's just not the kind of things you build a **Magic** card around.

Red is simple – Just because red doesn't like to think doesn't mean that its philosophy is simplistic. Emotions, for example, are quite complex. In addition, if you look at red's two most basic conflicts – chaos vs. order (red vs. white) and emotion vs. intellect (red vs. blue) – you'll see that they are both very intricate.

I find red to be one of the most interesting colors to study. Its motivations are easy to understand but hard to interpret. In addition, red has numerous aspects that get overlooked in the game as they don't make much sense in a duel setting. Hopefully, today's column will make you all take a second look at what makes red tick.

Lady (and Men) In Red

What would a color philosophy be without my "assign characters to each color" exercise? (R&D did this experiment when we were trying to examine the color pie.) This is always the most controversial part of my color articles. But hey, why stop now. Here are some characters we stuck in red:

Romeo & Juliet – This is a very typical red story. Two teenagers are so fueled by their emotions that they self-destruct. If only either one of them had just a little blue in them, maybe it wouldn't have been a tragedy.

Homer Simpson – I made a claim that each of the five Simpson family members was a different color. If you've been paying attention, Homer is the red member of the family. He is very much driven by his emotional needs and desires. He creates chaos not because he enjoys watching people in pain like Bart but because his natural behavior tends to break down systems. Homer's quest is not one for power but rather one for doughnuts.

Groo, the Wanderer – Motivated by cheese dip rather than doughnuts, Groo and Homer have a lot in common. The biggest difference is that Groo creates even more chaos and destruction in his wake. An interesting side note is that Starke of Rath's playtest name was "Groo, the Wanderer".

Wile E. Coyote – Has there ever been a more passionate cartoon character? He just wants one thing and he will let nothing (not an errant boulder, not a train, not a malfunctioning Acme product) stop him in his quest. There are some that might argue that he's a thinker (and thus blue). I say fifty plus years and he's captured the Road Runner once (yes, he did get him once) – not much of a thinker. Rather an irrational, obsessed, clumsy red character.

In the Red

And that, my fellow readers, is what red is all about. Whew! Five out of five. And it only took twenty-two months.

Join me next week when I take you on a Tour.

Until then, may you do what you feel.

Mark Rosewater

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