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# Pretty Sneaky Sis

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Making Magic  
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Welcome to Dimir Week! This is the third in a ten part series exploring the color pie philosophies of the ten two-color pairings ("[Group Think](#)" and "[Life and Death](#)", the green/white and black/green respectively, were the first two). The entire series is a follow-up to an earlier series where I explored the color pie philosophies of the five mono-colors – white, blue, black, red and green. (Quick tip: "[Seeing Red](#)" has links to the other four, so all you need is that one link to find all five articles.) I will not be talking about the Dimir guild in specific as I am more focused on the interaction of the two colors in general. Check in on Matt Cavotta's "[Taste the Magic](#)" this Wednesday for more info on the Dimir guild.



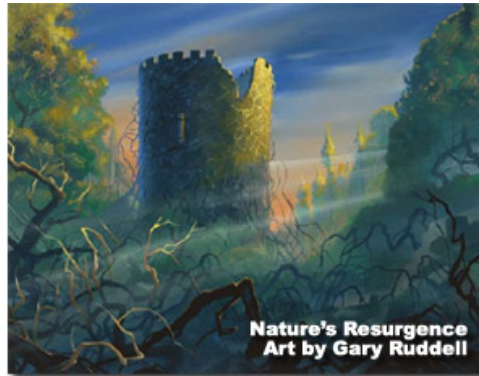
So, how exactly do I tackle the color pie philosophy of two intersecting colors? By answering the following questions (the whole ten part series works this way for those of you just joining us):

- What do the two colors have in common?
- How do the two colors differ? What is the guild's internal conflict?
- What does the guild care about? What is its end goal? What means does the guild use to achieve these ends?
- What does the guild despise? What negatively drives the guild?
- What is the color's greatest strength and biggest weakness?

Got it? Good, on with the show.

## What do the two colors have in common?

The trick for allied colors is to examine the shared enemy of the two colors. For blue/black that would be green. Green desires to preserve the natural order. While every other color is trying to change the world, green fights hard to keep the status quo. Green wants things to progress as they would if it wasn't there. In addition, green is the most open and honest color. It has no need to keep secrets. Green wears its agenda on its sleeve for all to see.



Blue/black is the exact opposite. Blue/black wants to subvert the status quo. The selfishness of black combined with blue's desire to adapt the world around it creates a guild bent on shaping the world for its own means. In addition, blue/black has none of green's openness. Blue/black is the most secretive of the guilds. Blue/black understands that other people having knowledge of what you are up to is only a negative.

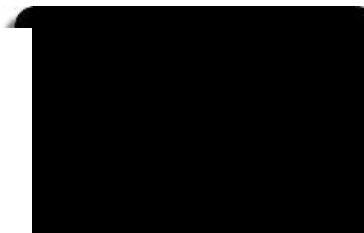
Blue seeks omniscience. Black seeks omnipotence. Blue wants to be able to know everything while black wants to be able to do anything. Blue/black sees these two needs as overlapping. Knowledge is power. Thus information is an excellent tool to force others to do your bidding.

Most importantly, blue and black understand the power that comes from your opponent having information on you. As such, blue/black keeps the lowest profile of any of the ten two-color combinations. Blue/black sees great value in hiding its threats until the last possible moment. This is why blue/black's route to victory is so subtle. Blue/black doesn't want your opponent to know he's lost until it's too late for him or her to do anything about it. Blue/black's enemies are constantly crying out, "What happened?"

## How do the two colors differ? What is the guild's internal conflict?

With allied pairs, the trick is to look at the conflict of the colors' two other allies. Blue's other ally is white while black's other ally is red. The conflict between these two colors is chaos versus order. Red wants to do things however it sees fit with no planning ahead or overall consistency. White, on the other hand, craves structure.

The way this conflict plays out is in how the two colors choose to achieve their goal. Blue wants to be very structured in its take-over of the world. Black, on the other hand, is much more focused on the results. This



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difference of execution causes the most problems for the guild. The blue side cannot stand that the black side doesn't think more about its actions. The black side feels like the blue side wastes time overanalyzing.

The one other major difference between the two colors is their motives. Blue crafts a better world because it believes that it is its duty to improve the world. (Blue subscribes to the tabula rasa school of thought that says that everything starts as a blank slate with the potential to become anything.) Black does so for itself. It wants to make a better world for itself. Black changes things because, quite frankly, it's in black's best interest. Mix these two motives together and you have a guild that is a little conflicted in how it's choosing to change the world.

## What does the guild care about? What is its end goal? What means does the guild use to achieve these ends?

To understand the guild's goal we need to look at the overlap of the goals of the two colors. Blue is driven by its quest for knowledge. It wants to understand everything. Why? Because it believes that everything can be improved upon. With knowledge comes the answer of not only how to transform it but what to transform it into. Black, on the other hand, is driven by selfishness. Black wants to change the world to make its own life as good as possible. As such, black seeks power because the ultimate security is having the ability to do whatever you want whenever you want.



So what happens when you mix the desire to change the world with the desire to control it? You get blue/black, the tribe whose key goal is to subvert the world to its own means. (As secretly as possible, of course.) Blue/black's end goal? Unrestricted knowledge and absolute power. That's all.

How does blue/black achieve this? First and foremost by being very, very secretive. Blue/black doesn't want to meet resistance. So it attacks its enemies slowly, subtly and at the worst time for the opponent to respond. Second, blue/black doesn't restrict itself with silly things like ethics or emotion. Blue/black is willing to do what is needed to accomplish their task. This includes removing any obstacles (living or otherwise) in its way. Third, blue/black is intelligent and it chooses its battles very carefully.

When all of the elements are combined you get a guild that is highly dangerous. It's vicious yet subtle. Ruthless yet careful. Brutal yet secretive.

## What does the guild despise? What negatively drives the guild?

The easiest way to answer this question for an ally color pair is to look at what the shared enemy does. So what does green do that drives black/blue up a wall? Green is everything that blue/black strives not to be. Green is open and sharing. It's mindless in its motivations. It thinks about others. It strives to keep the status quo. But worst of all, it doesn't have any of the traits that blue/black needs to control it. It's not driven by selfish needs or secretive information. It can't be bribed as its only desire is for nothing to happen. It's the embodiment of something that is hard for blue/black to control.

Blue/black hates seeing the world as others want it to be. It is this threat of being at the mercy of someone else's desire that drives blue/black to do what it does. This means that blue/black has to constantly undermine everyone else's agenda. Subtly, of course. It has to be the puppet master constantly pulling the strings of those around it.

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

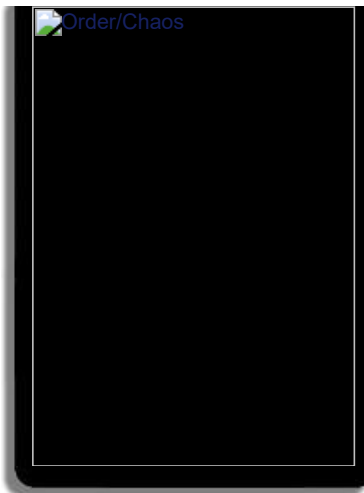
Blue/black's greatest strength is its sneakiness. No one sees it coming. If there were one guild you'd least want to upset it would be blue/black, because they'll definitely strike back but not in a way that you'd ever be able to anticipate.

Blue/black's greatest weakness is its complete lack of trust. Even amongst itself. Blue/black's need for secrecy means that its left hand almost never knows what the right hand is doing. It doesn't even know if there is a right hand. Blue/black's biggest obstacle is often itself because its secrecy keeps it from realizing that the enemy is actually another part of the guild.



## Final Thought

I've chosen to spend a little time during each guild column to discuss an aspect of the guild that I think is misunderstood. For blue/black I want to talk about its mechanical focus. For each of the guilds in Ravnica, the



design team wanted to come up with a clear-cut strategy that the guild employed to win. Blue/black is the least focused. Why? Because blue/black is the least focused guild in how it sets out to win. Blue/black thrives on being sneaky. If its route to victory was always exactly the same, it would be very hard to accomplish this.

This is why the design team built in a very layered approach to blue/black. We wanted to keep people playing blue/black on their toes. Black/blue had several different options available to it that allowed the black/blue player to be able to surprise the opponent. That said, we didn't want to keep black/blue from having any identity so we made sure to give it the most noticeable win condition – milling. The trade-off was that it was designed to only be the route to victory some of the time. Whenever you face off against black/blue in *Ravnica* you need to be nervous about being milled out even though the majority of games the threat of milling may never come to pass.

## All For One and One For All

What would a color pie philosophy column be without a few examples for you all to argue about?

**Lex Luthor** – The interesting thing about Superman's chief nemesis is that he is as interested in understanding the world as he is in controlling it. At heart, Luthor is a scientist. Sure, he often uses those skills to try and kill Superman, but it is always interesting to watch Luthor torn between his desire to eradicate Superman and his ability to learn. More than once Superman has been saved because Luthor's attention was more on the latter than the former. Another big Superman villain, Brainiac, also fits here for many of the same reasons, but I figured that Luthor was the better known character.

**The Borg** – There has been a lot of talk about where the Borg fit on the color pie chart. I believe the placement has a lot to do with what you think motivates the Borg. I believe the Borg is driven by two things, a need to learn and a need to control. There isn't a more blue/black motive than that. If you ascribe a more benign motive to the Borg, there is an argument for green/white, but I've personally watched enough Star Trek episodes that I just don't believe their motives are benign.

**Rita Skeeter (the gossip columnist/reporter from the *Harry Potter* books)** – Rita thinks only about Rita. But the tool she uses to gain what she wants is information (gossip is just juicy information after all). The more she learns the greater her power.

**Stewey (from *Family Guy*)** – What do you get when you mix incredible selfishness with a never-ending quest of discovery? Why, a baby. I've chosen Stewey as he is more selfish and more inquisitive than most other fictional babies I could think of. Note also that Stewey, while clearly being blue/black, is also not what people think of as a traditional "bad guy". (I guess you could argue the same for Rita Skeeter, but Stewey is definitely more likeable.)

## You'd Better Watch Out

And that my friends is all there is to say about the sneakiest guild around. As always I'm interested to hear any feedback.

Join me next week when I'll be panning for gold.

Until then, may you learn how best to watch your back.

Mark Rosewater

*Mark Rosewater is Head **Magic** Designer. What this fancy title means is that he's in charge of **Magic** design. This gets him a lot of mail (which he actually reads). When not alternatively destroying and saving **Magic**, he likes to spend time with his family, do stereotypically geeky things (play games, read comics, watch a lot of science fiction, etc.) and write about himself in third person.*



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