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Playing By Their Own Rules

Mark Rosewater
Making Magic
Monday, March 27, 2006



If You're Interested In Working For Wizards Of The Coast, Make Sure You Check Out The End Of This Column.

Welcome to Orzhov Week! If you're familiar with this series of articles, I'd advise skipping to the paragraph after the first header. (There might be a wee bit of repetition from the first six columns in this series.) If you're new to this series or just love them hyperlinks, continue on. This is the third and final of the *Guildpact* theme weeks and the seventh of the *Ravnica* block (*Dissension* previews are right around the corner). So far, I've written on [Selesnya](#), [Golgari](#), [Dimir](#), [Boros](#), [Gruul](#) and [Izzet](#).) Azorius, Simic and Rakdos will get their own column later this spring and/or summer (with this series of paragraphs repeated yet again). This ten-part series is based upon a five-part series – six if you count artifacts – that I did several years ago where I explored the philosophy of each of the five colors. (“[It's Not Easy Being Green](#)”, “[The Great White Way](#)”, “[True Blue](#)”, “[In the Black](#)”, and “[Seeing Red](#)”).



As obliged by nobody in particular, let me remind everyone that this article focuses on the intersection of the philosophies of White and Black (as in the colors of **Magic** – I somehow always seem to spur letters when I don't point this out for these two colors) rather than talk about the Orzhov guild in specific. (Check out this week's “Taste the Magic” column by Matt Cavotta for more on the Orzhov.) Nonetheless it's meaty stuff, so I think you all might find a thing or two of interest in it. Here are the questions I'll be addressing:

- 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?

Before I wrap up I'll finish by giving some pop culture examples of White/Black to create some extra bulletin board posts/e-mail. Hopefully, if you've already read this intro six times before you listened to my advice and skipped ahead. If not, can I suggest you really do so for numbers eight, nine and ten. I keep saying the same thing. Well, I guess some people enjoy repetition. And for all of you I feel obliged to say – my you seem to love repetition (it was an easy joke and I never was one to avoid those). For the new readers, welcome and let's get started.

What do the two colors have in common?

The key to understanding two enemy colors is understanding the conflict between them. Ironically, the conflict between Black and White is the most iconic yet the most complex. White vs. Black represents so many different things: Morality vs. Amoral, The Value of the Group vs. the Value of the Individual; Light vs. Dark; Focusing Outward vs. Focusing Inward. (This is the point where a number of you are shouting at your computer screen “Good vs. Evil! It's Good vs. Evil, for the love of all that matters!” I'll get to this issue before the column is out. For now just pretend that Morality vs. Amoral is Good vs. Evil. I know it's not. That's why I said “pretend”. It's in the ballpark.)

In short, White is all about doing what benefits the good of the group. You know using things like morals and ethics. Black, on the other hand, benefits itself. Black does what's good for Black. Not even Black as a whole – each Black mages looks out solely for himself, selling out any other Black mages if the needs arises. It's an understatement to say that these two vantage points are in direct conflict with one another. So how does the White/Black guild deal with this dichotomy? Compromises, my dear reader, compromises.

The key is making each half refocus how it thinks and meeting halfway. The way this is done is by focusing on the needs of a small insular group. The White half thinks of the group as its community. The Black half uses its selfish means to advance the group as an extension of itself. This allows both halves to treat the group with foremost importance.



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Time Spiral
Time Spiral Cycle, Book I
by Scott McGough

The similarities don't stop there though. One of the defining qualities of the White/Black conflict is that the two colors parallel one another in many ways. For example, White and Black are the two colors most affiliated with religion (and thus, mechanically, have the vast majority of all the clerics). Both colors have a similar creature/spell ratio. Both colors make use of sacrifice (sure, White sacrifices itself for the good of the group and Black sacrifices *others* for the good of itself, but that's just splitting hairs). White and Black are the two colors best at mass creature removal (okay, okay Red doesn't suck either). The two both use spirit link from time to time. The list is surprisingly long for two colors that hate each other's guts.

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

As I stated above, White and Black care about diametrically opposed ideals. White lives to serve the group. Black lives to serve the individual. White wants to create rules and laws and morals to protect the welfare of the average citizen. Black couldn't care less about the average citizen. Well, unless there's some way to get something from him to make one's own life better. The average man is just yet another pawn to Black.

The guild conflict that results from this is one of confused loyalties. The White half needs to trust and believe in the group. The Black half is paranoid and skeptical. Trust and paranoia don't play so nicely together. What results is a guild that bands together out of mutual necessity, but never completely bonds. The best parallel I can give for this is a wonderful game called *Diplomacy*. For those of you that have never played, *Diplomacy* is a strategy war game. Each person represents a different company in 1900 Europe. The key to the game rests on alliances you make with one another as you each attempt to take control of other people's areas.

Here's the dilemma. You can't win without alliances. Yet everyone ultimately needs to betray you to win. You have to trust people, yet can never truly trust anyone. That, my friends, is White/Black.

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 goals, we have to first look at the goals of each of the two colors. White seeks peace. White wants everyone to get along. Black seeks omnipotence. Black wants to have all the power for itself. So how does one have both peace and omnipotence? By being the one that controls the peace. White/Black wants a world without pain and suffering. Although it understands it might need to use pain and suffering to achieve this goal. White/Black believes in tough love. It keeps you safe at the cost of all your liberties. After all, what do you need liberties for if White/Black is taking control of everything for you?

The key to making this work is making sure everyone has a clear understanding of their place and order. This is why White/Black loves hierarchies. Unhappiness comes from wanting to achieve something you cannot. If you know your exact place, then you will not deceive yourself into believing that you will ever get any more, and you can be satisfied in knowing you will never get anything less. White/Black trades potential for security. Wouldn't you be willing to give up all rewards to live in a world without risks?

White/Black uses structure as a means of gaining power. He (or she) who makes the rules can make them in their own best interest. At the same time, White/Black feels an obligation towards the individuals who make up its structure. It's kind of like the bully who makes sure that no other bully bothers you... Give me my fair share of your lunch money and then you are guaranteed that no one else will take any more. After all the energy White/Black takes to make its flock, it definitely needs to take steps to shepherd it.

White/Black has one last trick up its sleeve. While it uses its structure as a means to immobilize everyone it comes in contact with, it also, slowly (in the background), saps away the resources of all who oppose it. White/Black is patient. It understands that small gains (or the opponent's small losses) will build up over time. There's no need to rush if you have control of the situation.

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

The best way to examine what an enemy color pair despises is to look at the similarity of the colors' two other enemies. For White that would be Red. For Black it is Green. What do Red and Green have in common? A desire to function off impulse or instinct. Red and Green act with the gut rather than the head. They are the two colors that least like thinking. They prefer acting. White/Black doesn't like that way of thinking (or is that not thinking) at all.

White/Black prefers a docile society. Thoughts can be swayed. Logic can be argued. But mindless instinct is a lost cause. The key to White/Black's success is convincing all those around it that what White/Black is doing is in their best interest. Or at worst stall them long enough to get the dirty work done behind the scenes. It doesn't work if the people never take the bait. White/Black's only choice with people that act before they think is destruction. Because if you can't fit in White/Black's master scheme, you are worthless to White/Black.

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

White/Black's greatest strength is its ability to institute order. You might think this would be mono-White's domain, but mono-White has the problem that what is good for the group comes at the expense of individuals. Selling White's vision requires more effort. White/Black, on the other hand, only focuses on a subgroup. As such, it can offer that subgroup things at the expense of everyone not in the subgroup. It's much easier to be sold a package when someone else is doing the suffering.

White/Black's greatest weakness is its ability to self-destruct. Everything White/Black is carefully building is based upon a shaky trust. White/Black can rely on others within its subgroup most of the time but not all of the time. And when things go bad for White/Black, they can get rather ugly.

Good and Evil

Now I get to the part of the column destined to increase my inbox this week. Whenever we talk about White and Black, the issue of good versus evil always comes up. Good versus evil, it is argued, is a time-tested staple of fantasy. In fact, there are those who believe (and count me among "those") that the fantasy genre is fundamentally about morality. If this is so, how can **Magic** not have good and evil?

My answer is, it does. **Magic** has good. **Magic** has evil. Good and evil square off against one another quite often. My claim is that this conflict is not isolated solely to White and Black. In fact, I believe that the conflict is so key to fantasy that we (being the overseers of the game's flavor) don't have the luxury of limiting it to just two colors.

In addition, remember that **Magic** has to constantly reinvent itself. Every year, we visit a new plane with a new environment filled with new creatures and new spells. In order to give each world its own emotional depth, the Creative Team has to be able to shift how the colors function (in how they relay elements of story). Good and evil are far too valuable a creative tool in this task to limit to one or two of the five colors.

That said, I'm not saying that White isn't more good than any other color or that Black isn't more evil. My point is that, one, White isn't the sole representative of good in the game (vice versa for Black) and, two, evil is allowed to show up in White (and vice versa once again for Black). This doesn't mean we try at every turn to show the evil in White or the goodness in Black, because we don't. In fact, grab a random allotment of White and Black **Magic** cards. Look at them. In general, White is going to feel more good and Black's going to feel more evil.

We just need the freedom to be able to express good in Black and evil in White (as well as expressing good and evil in Blue, Red and Green). Having the right to do it doesn't mean we exercise it every other card. It means that from time to time when the environment is right, we allow ourselves to occasionally have the Black hero and/or the White villain (see *Champions of Kamigawa* block) or even just allow ourselves the freedom to dip our creative toe into the world of grey.

That is why White vs. Black is not good vs. evil. (I'm ready for the letters now.)

A Few Not-So-Good Men

Last but not least, it's time to throw out a few White/Black pop culture references to jumpstart this week's thread:

Don Corleone – As I mentioned in an earlier column ("[Now I Know My ABC's](#)"), Don Coreleone was the very first character I thought of when trying to identify the essence of the ten *Ravnica* block guilds. To me, the mafia (as represented in *The Godfather*) is the perfect example of White/Black. The group is fundamentally very selfish yet is very respectful of "the family" as an entity. Don Corleone, for example, goes to great lengths to look out for his family. He greatly values what the group represents. That said, when he has to whack someone in his own family for his own reasons, he doesn't hesitate. Okay, he probably feels a little guilty, but then that's how White/Black works.

Magneto – Magneto is not your average villain looking to take over the world. I mean, yes he does want to take over the world, but for a cause he greatly believes in. His family is the family of mutants. (And for comic fans out there, I'm not going to even get into the post-"House of M" Magneto.) He is motivated by doing what is best for the mutant race. He cares very much about their welfare, so much so that to care for them he is more than happy to kill all the humans. Humans are not part of his little subgroup and thus get the Black end of the stick.

Spike (from *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel*) – You don't get much more selfish than Spike. Yet in every incarnation of the character, there's some other person or persons that drives his motivations (starting with Drusilla through Buffy and ending on the Angel gang). He is always looking out for someone else. As the character evolved, he found himself drawn to helping out the greater good. He even sacrificed himself to stop a greater evil. Yet his selfish ways persisted throughout.

Jerry Seinfeld (the character from *Seinfeld*, not the comedian who actually exists) – Jerry is motivated by selfishness. Yet he has this compulsion for order. (He alphabetizes his cereal boxes as an example.) Like the



other White/Black characters, he has his little clique that he values. In Jerry's case, it is his small group of friends. He actually, well for as much as Jerry can, looks out for them, provided, of course, that his own needs don't get in the way.

Keeping Everyone In Line

And there you have my thoughts on White/Black. The final three columns in this series will be along before you know it. As always, I love to hear your feedback.

Join me next week when I take a look at a few of the letters I keep generating.

Until then, may you figure out who your subgroup is.

Mark Rosewater

So You Want To Work At Wizards...

A little over two years ago I posted a job opening in R&D and it got more respondents than any job in Wizards of the Coast's history. That's when I figured out that you guys like hearing about job openings. So, guess what? Here's yet another chance to have your hand in the making of **Magic**.

This time though it's not in R&D, but rather on the **Magic** Brand Team. How ironic that it's Orzhov Week. (I kid, I kid.) Here's what we're looking for. We need someone with professional marketing experience that plays **Magic**. We're not looking for Pro Tour skills, just someone who plays enough to understand what other **Magic** players might like about the game.

The new position for those that crave titles is for an Assistant Brand Manager. The person will help guide **Magic's** marketing strategy as part of the **Magic** Brand Team. And you'll have to put up with me, as I'm R&D's liason for marketing issues. If I haven't scared you away yet, feel free to [click here](#) for all the info.

Good luck.

*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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