

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



# Improving Upon Nature

Mark Rosewater  
Making Magic  
Monday, May 29, 2006



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

Welcome to Simic Week! Wizards of the Coast is out of the office for the Memorial Day holiday, and will return with new articles beginning Tuesday, 5/30. In case you missed it, what follows is the article that ran in this slot last week. In the meantime, [this week's feature article](#) by Mark Gottlieb is already up for your holiday reading pleasure. See you tomorrow!

Scott Johns, *magicthegathering.com* Producer

Welcome to Simic Week! Okay, that's not exactly true. Welcome to the Week Before Simic Week! What's going on? Well, next week's Simic Week and I've committed myself to this little ten piece series (you can check out my [Selesnya](#), [Golgari](#), [Dimir](#), [Boros](#), [Gruul](#), [Izzet](#), [Orzhov](#) and [Azorius](#) columns by clicking on the links), of which the Simic column would be my ninth. The problem is that next Monday is Memorial Day (an American holiday honoring those who have died in the line of duty to the country for my non-American readers) and [magicthegathering.com](#) doesn't do new columns on major holidays (major defined as Wizards being closed). So I've decided to do my column a week earlier. The column I planned for today will run in two weeks (don't worry, I haven't forgotten about it).



This ten-part series on the guilds was inspired by an original five-part series on the five mono colors ("[It's Not Easy Being Green](#)", "[The Great White Way](#)", "[True Blue](#)", "[In the Black](#)", and "[Seeing Red](#)")., six if you count my [article on artifacts](#). Feel free to read all that came before this if you enjoy today's column. Also, I should point out that this column is more about the interaction of blue and green than it is about the Simic guild in general. For more on the Simic, I suggest checking out Matt Cavotta's column ("[Taste the Magic](#)") a week from this Wednesday – you know, during the actual Simic Week.

I always start each of these columns by reminding you all of the questions I ask each time:

- 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?

As always I'll end the column with a quick discussion of a Simic-related topic and a few pop culture examples to spice up the thread and my e-mails. Whew, only one more time and you'll never have to read the "welcome to the guild series" introduction ever again. (Well until we do the tri-color guild block.)

## What do the two colors have in common?

As faithful readers of this series are aware, we always start with enemy pairs by examining the core conflict between them. For Green and Blue it's another classic: Nature vs. Nurture. Let's start with the Green half. Green believes that things are born with all their potential already built in. People (and all other living things) are essentially slaves to their genes. Whatever nature intended for you to be is what you will be. Green doesn't see this as a bad thing. Rather Green embraces it. To Green, this is the center of great calmness. Everyone else struggles to find where they fit in the world. Green's attitude is that you don't have to find your role in the world - your role will find you.

Blue, on the other hand, sees everyone starting as a blank slate. Blue believes that anyone can become



anything. The key to doing this is knowledge. With knowledge comes the answers about how to change. Anything can be adapted as long as the transformation is understood. Blue takes great comfort in the fact that anyone has the potential to become whatever they desire. If you truly desire something, blue believes nothing is unattainable.

Green and blue approach their problems from opposite ends of the spectrum. Green wants everything to be left alone. Green just wants nature to proceed unobstructed. Blue wants to meddle with everything. Blue wants to "fix" things and make them better. Green embraces nature. Blue embraces technology. Green favors reality. Blue favors illusion.

Final Wrap-up  
[Top 8 Video Archives](#)



Green acts without thinking. Blue never acts without thinking.

So how does this odd couple come together? By finding the overlap in their two philosophies. Green wants nature to evolve. Blue likes to tinker. What if you took Blue's inclinations and applied them to Green's subject matter? What if the Simic strived to improve upon nature? (See, the titles do mean something.) For example, when two different species mate, they create a hybrid offspring. Nature left to its own accord does some of the experimentation that blue does in the laboratory. The Simic latches onto this tendency of nature to evolve and just speeds it up a little. These kinds of things would happen... eventually. Green/Blue is just facilitating nature, you know, at an accelerated speed.

When you start looking at the two colors, you realize that there is a little bit of overlap. Both colors enjoy changing themselves. Both have the ability to shift and advance over time. Both have protective magic to prevent other magic from hurting their creatures. Both colors have some ability to draw cards and to search their own library. The two colors are a lot closer than you might realize at first glance.

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

While the two colors overlap in their interest to see how nature can evolve, their motivations couldn't be more different. Green simply wants to speed along the natural process. Blue enjoys the experimentation because it wants to see what is possible. Green is trying to find a short cut. Blue is trying to find tricks that will allow it to do very unnatural things elsewhere.

The guild's internal conflict comes from these varied motives. Green/Blue is advancing two opposing desires. The Green half feels that it is promoting nature. The Blue half thinks it's exploiting it. (And the use of the words "feel" and "think" are far from an accident.) The Simic understand that their two goals conflict with one another.

***Blue enjoys the experimentation because it wants to see what is possible. Green simply wants to speed along the natural process.***

The result of this internal conflict is that the Simic are quite mad and a little bit paranoid. They are so focused on their task at hand and so in denial of what cause they are advancing that Green/Blue follows its own fevered style of logic. Experiments naturally lead from one to the next without the Simic ever stopping to really understand what they've done. This obsession is so strong that they lose all other focus. To put it another way, the Izzet are the absent minded professors of Ravnica. The Simic are the mad scientists.

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

To understand the goal of the guild, we need to start by looking at the goal of the two colors. Green seeks growth. Green wants nature to flourish. It wants the status quo to continue unabated. Blue seeks knowledge. Blue wants to learn every secret of the universe. Why? Because this knowledge will allow it to shape the world in whatever image it desires. When you combine these two goals together, you get a guild that wants ultimate knowledge of nature to allow it to speed along nature's evolution. The guild wants to use knowledge as a means to propagate growth.

So what does the guild care about? Evolution. Green/Blue is laser focused on understanding how nature advances. The Simic want to be an agent of natural change. As Green/Blue sees it, it is a part of nature. It advances nature because nature created it to do just that. The Simic were born to be a catalyst of change.

The tools Green/Blue uses most are observation and experimentation. The Simic utilize both of these very aggressively. It is not bound by any rules, civil or moral, in what it will examine or how it will try to adapt something. If Green/Blue gets an inkling into its head, it will explore despite the consequences.

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

The key to understanding what an enemy pair despises is looking at the two other enemies of the two colors and see what those two have in common. Green's other enemy is Black. Blue's other enemy is Red. What do Black and Red have in common? Self Interest. Red and Black do what they want to advance their own personal goals. While Blue/Green is very reckless in its methods, its motives are very unselfish. Green/Blue believes it is advancing the greater cause. Green/Blue never focuses on itself.

This is one of the great ironies of Green/Blue. It is mindless in its quest and willing to do whatever it takes to advance it, yet has great disdain for self promotion. Green/Blue sees its greatest obstacles as those who do not understand its mission. Only by action of these individuals can its great plan be halted. It is therefore Green/Blue's mission to stop these forces before they intervene on Green/Blue's experiments.

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

Green/Blue's greatest strength is its focus. The Simic are willing to go where its data leads it. Once it has the bread crumbs leading to its goal, nothing will move it off its course, even if something has gone wrong internally.

This leads to Green/Blue's greatest weakness: its inability to stop what its doing. Green/Blue is so focused in its goal that it often cannot see the forest for the trees. Things that might seem obvious to anyone with some

perspective are ignored by Green/Blue. As far as Green/Blue is concerned, the others don't understand what it's up to and it doesn't have the time to explain.

## Creature Comforts



For each of the guild articles, I've chosen to examine a topic that is relevant to the guild at hand. For Green/Blue I thought I'd look into R&D's decision to focus the guild on creatures. At first blush, the decision might seem a little odd. While Green is the color most focused on creatures, Blue is the least. And most of Green and Blue's overlap doesn't happen in creatures. In fact, when you look at the creatures in Green and Blue they seem like bitter enemies. Blue is the flying color. Green is the anti-flying color. Blue is one of the colors with the smallest average creature size (second to white). Green is the color with the highest average. Blue's creatures are more utility based (that is they tend to have more activated abilities that help control the game). Green creatures are more focused on being played and attacking.

The decision to focus on creatures is threefold. First, all the guilds in general were more apt to care about creatures. This stems from the fact that we focused on the guilds as being a collection of creatures. Second, many of the other blue-based guilds had a less than average focus on creatures. The Zzzet, for example, were the guild all about instants and sorceries. And third, the flavor of the guild wanted to focus on creature experimentation. When you think about a guild that experiments on nature, you imagine the guild doing many crazy experiments on creatures.

With this in mind, we decided to try and find a keyword mechanic for the Simic that was a creature keyword. We also wanted it to capture the feeling of the Simic "evolving nature". I'm quite happy with the "build your own monster" feel that the Simic ended up with.

## Mad About Doctors

Last, but not least, a few pop culture references to add a little spice.

**Dr. Moreau** – I mentioned the good doctor last time I talked about the Simic. If ever there was a character who embodied advancing nature, Dr. Moreau is it. He took the idea of improving nature to the extreme.

**Dr. Frankenstein** – Note that I'm talking about the scientist and not the monster. Like Dr. Moreau, Dr. Frankenstein really did feel that he was advancing a greater cause. And he too was a little mad. Now, I'm sure in the threads that I'll get some people claiming that the good doctor is Black/Green. I mean he was raising the dead after all. But I believe that Dr. Frankenstein was not driven by self-interest, but by a desire to advance science. He was messing with the laws of nature because he was obsessed in his quest. Can you get much more Simic than that?

**John Hammond (from *Jurassic Park*)** – This is the man (played by Richard Attenborough in the film) who brought the dinosaurs back to life. The character as portrayed in the film (I believe the character in the novel to be more driven by self-interest) was drawn to his actions by a desire to play with the very fabric of nature. He was advancing nature in a different way, bringing back that which nature had left behind, yet he has all the telltale signs of a man caught up in his obsession to improve upon the world set before him.

**Dr. Otto Octavius (from *Spider-man II*)** – For those of you out there that might not recognize the name, this is the man who became Doctor Octopus. (I refuse to call him Doc Ock. While I don't mind the nickname, it annoyed me that the film refused to use the term Dr. Octopus as if they were embarrassed by the name. The hero is called Spider-man. How embarrassing can being named after another animal be? But I digress...) The reason I've included Octavius here is that the pre-Dr. Octopus is a perfect example of Green/Blue. He is obsessed with finding a new way to play with the very laws of nature. His focus is so strong that he dismisses all the dangers with what he is doing.



## Change For The Better

Nine down, one to go. That's what I have on Green/Blue. As always (and particularly with this series), I am interested to hear your feedback.

Join me next week when... well, when nothing happens because it's Memorial Day. But the week after I promise to write something to poke the bear a little.

Until then, may you have fun advancing your own causes.

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.



[Discuss](#) on the message boards



[Respond](#) via email



[Mark Rosewater](#) archive

---

[About Us](#) | [Jobs](#) | [New to the Game?](#) | [Inside Wizards](#) | [Find a Store](#) | [Press](#) | [Help](#) | [Sitemap](#)

---

© 1995-2007 Wizards of the Coast, Inc., a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Terms of Use](#) - [Privacy Statement](#)

