

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



Hedonism With Attitude

Mark Rosewater
Making Magic
Monday, August 14, 2006



PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

Welcome to Rakkos Week! Finally! Yes, the ten-part two-color guild articles are finally coming to a close, this being number ten and all. (In case this whole series is new to you, feel free to check out my columns on [Selesnya](#), [Golgari](#), [Dimir](#), [Boros](#), [Gruul](#), [Izzet](#), [Orzhov](#), [Azorius](#) and [Simic](#).) I'm sorry for the delay, but *Coldsnap* doesn't like to be ignored.



The ten-part series was inspired by an original five-part series (six if you count [artifacts](#)) on the mono color and their philosophies ([green](#), [white](#), [blue](#), [black](#) and [red](#)). So if you like what you see here today, there's lots more where this came from. Finally, as always, I should point out that my column today is not about the Rakkos guild in particular. Rather it is an examination of the philosophy that results from the overlap of black and red. Please check out Matt Cavotta's "Taste the Magic" column this Wednesday to hear more about the Rakkos guild.

As it's been a while, let me recap how this is going to work. For each of these guild articles, I answer the following questions:

- 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?

After the questions I will examine some aspect of the Rakkos that I feel is misunderstood. Then, as is tradition, I will end the column by giving some pop culture examples. This is then followed by numerous board threads and emails where all of you tell why I'm mistaken about one of my choices. And with that, you are now done with ever having to read this intro ever again. (And I never have to write it again – hoo haw!)

What do the two colors have in common?

The trick to understanding an allied color pair is to examine the color that shares their enmity, in this case white. So let's begin by looking at what white represents. White is all about order, both civil and moral. The first half leads white to care about the law and the second to care about religion. White believes that there is a right and a wrong answer to every problem. White is also very focused on the needs of the group. White does not what is best for any one individual, but rather what aids the society at large. So what does this mean for black and red? They'll have none of that.

Black and red could care less about the needs of the group. Black/red believes that everyone needs to look out solely for themselves. The welfare of other people? That's their business. (Okay, okay red does occasionally look out for those it has strong feelings about.) Black/red also doesn't like rules. It does what it wants to do. It does what helps its cause. And since it has no allegiance to structure of any kind, be it laws or morality, the Rakkos does what the Rakkos wants to do. Which basically means creating mayhem and chaos.

The biggest overlap between black and red is its desire to do what it wants and not allowing the needs of others get in its way. Black is more motivated by selfishness and red more by emotion, but the two combine nicely into hedonism in its purist form.

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

To understand the conflict between an allied color pair, you need to take a look at the conflict of the color's other two allies. For Rakkos that is green (black's other enemy) versus blue (red's other enemy). The key green/blue conflict is nature vs. nurture. Green believes that things are born as they will always be. Blue sees creatures as coming into the world as blank slates that are shaped by their experiences. To green, you are born with your destiny. To blue, you create it.

Black/red's biggest internal conflict comes from this schism. Black sees the world as a place ripe for picking. As such, black is very motivated to try and change the world around it. Red, on the other hand, takes the world at face value. Red doesn't want to work towards anything. Red just wants to deal with the world as it is. Black's long term thinking clashes with red's "think it now, do it now" philosophy.



While many a guild's internal conflicts are more philosophical in nature, Rakdos' conflict is very internalized. Black/red acts both impulsively and with thought. Often at the same time. This makes black/red quite schizophrenic and, often times, just plum crazy. This is why Rakdos' enemies have trouble predicting their behavior. Because even Rakdos doesn't know what they're going to do until they do it.

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 the two individual colors. We'll begin with black. Black is motivated by a quest for power. Black wants it all – total control. Why? Because black is driven by selfishness. Black wants what will help black. To this end, black has learned that there is no commodity of greater value than power.

Red, on the other hand, seeks freedom. Red wants to do what it wants to do. It doesn't like anything that tells it can't. Red is driven by its emotional impulses. When it feels something, it acts. If it is unable to act, it focuses all its energies on the thing stopping it. Once that is destroyed, then back to Plan A.

The overlap between black and red is pretty clear. They want things their way. And both are willing to take the action necessary to make it happen. True, red tends to be more physical than black, but black is more than happy to take action, you know as long as it knows it's going to win.

The Rakdos achieve their goal through a willingness to do whatever it takes. Black/red is not held back by any sense of morality. Black/red doesn't allow itself to be influenced by the needs of others (especially people it doesn't know personally). Black/red looks out for number one.

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

The easiest way to determine this is to just look at what the shared enemy wants. Once again, that would be white. White wants peace. White wants everyone to be happy with what they have. White wants people to sacrifice for the good of the group. White wants structure. White wants order. White wants morality. White just wants us to all get along.

This kind of attitude just pisses black/red off. Black/red doesn't care about others. It doesn't want laws or religions. Those things just get in the way. Rakdos wants the world to bend to its whim. Sacrifice is good, just as long as others are sacrificing themselves to get you what you need.

Nothing drives Rakdos crazier than seeing others try to live up to white's ideals. Black/red can't relate to people that put the needs of others first or wait for what they want. No, people like this deserve to be trampled over as black/red seeks out what it wants. A foolish end for foolish people. The only real value these people offer the Rakdos is that it's fun destroying them. For example, lighting squirmy things on fire is a real hoot.

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

Black/red's greatest strength is a complete uncaring of the consequences of its actions. Oftentimes, people are held back by their own self-imposed limitations. Rakdos doesn't have this problem.

Black/red's greatest weakness? No self-control. When you live day-to-day doing what you want, it's hard to learn any sense of discipline. Black/red often gets mad at itself for later realizing that it did something stupid. Not that it really slows black/red down, it just makes them angry. This, of course, only perpetuates the cycle as Rakdos can do real stupid things when it's upset.



Bad to the Bone

For each of the guild articles, I like to examine an aspect of the guild that it misunderstood. For Rakdos, I want to talk about the difference of its two aspects. Both black and red will act out in its own self-interest trampling others in its wake but the reasons behind each color are actually quite different. I think many players falsely believe these two colors' motivations are similar.

So how does this differ from mono-red? Mono-red is driven by emotions. It does what it "feels" is the right thing to do. That said, red can very much get caught up in caring about others. Love, passion, loyalty, friendship – red's into all sorts of bonding experiences. Red doesn't set out to hurt others. It happens, but more as a side effect of red satisfying its own impulses more than any premeditated desire to cause others pain.

Black, on the other hand, chooses its actions very much to make others suffer. Black is all about power. Black takes great pride in showing others their place. Black is the color that can actually enjoy watching others suffer.

Because black cares about no one but itself. That said, black does not cause other people pain without a lot of forethought. Black is not short-sighted (like red). Black is very careful in the actions it takes because it does think of the “big picture.”

Red is destructive without thought; black is destructive without care. Red will often feel sorry after the fact. Black, not so much. Red often accidentally hurts itself following its impulses. Black can cause itself pain, but only after weighing the options of what they get for such a sacrifice.

While the two colors do have a lot in common, they are not made of the same cloth.

Crazy Selfish

Now comes the fun part where I illuminate the guild through pop culture references. Fun, fun, fun.

The Joker – I don’t know if a more black/red character exists. He’s selfish, yet still driven by a compulsion to entertain himself. He likes killing, but only if he can do it in the most chaotic way possible. He even has the telltale insanity.



Elaine Benes (from *Seinfeld*) – I promised that before the series was done, I’d place all four of the main characters from *Seinfeld*. I got a number of letters reminding me that I forgot Elaine. I hadn’t forgotten her, we just hadn’t gotten to the right column yet. Elaine is clearly black, as she, like most the characters on *Seinfeld*, is driven by selfishness. Time and time again Elaine demonstrates that she is motivated by what helps Elaine. Unlike Jerry and George though, Elaine is very much driven by her emotions. Elaine just can’t keep them under control. And they constantly get her in trouble. Black/red all the way.

Spike (from *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*) – I originally listed Spike in my Orzhov (white/black) column. A reader wrote in to point out that everything Spike ever did was done through passion. Yes, he helps out the Scooby Gang, but not because he’s a good guy. He does it because he has the hots for Buffy. In fact, you can figure out Spike’s motivation for most episodes by figuring out who exactly he has the hots for that week. Spike is about as emotional as vampires come in the Buffyverse. Plus, as I explained in the Orzhov column, he’s totally selfish. Black/red.

Anakin Skywalker – I think almost all the Sith are black/red. Obviously they are driven by selfishness. The interesting thing is how the Sith masters harness the power of negative raw emotions of their apprentices to “turn them to the dark side.” Anakin’s descent into darkness is tightly connected for his inability to deal with certain emotions such as anger and passion. Throughout all the *Star Wars* films, it is clear that Anakin’s inability to handle his darker emotions was the thing that pushed him over the edge into becoming Darth Vader. I mean, come on, a black costume with a red light saber? The Sith aren’t even hiding their Rakdosness.

The Party Comes To A Close

And with that, we come to an end of the guild columns. I hope you had fun with them. As always, any feedback is heartily encouraged.

Join me next week as it’s time for the 2006 State of Design column. Also, if you or someone you know has always wanted to work for Wizards, do *not* miss my column next week. I have news that should prove very exciting. Once again – don’t miss it!

Until then, may you find a chance for a little “me time”.

Mark Rosewater

Decking The Halls, Part Deux

Before you go, I have a little bonus section for you. Yes, it’s time for my votes for this year’s Hall of Fame. Rather than use up a whole column (I got a little negative feedback on that last year – and yes, that wasn’t the only thing I got negative feedback on), I felt it better to tack it on to the end of a normal column. It being Rakdos Week was just icing on the cake.

You’ll notice that everything after this paragraph is hidden. The reason being is that I wanted to offer a little warning. If you didn’t like my votes last year, let me be blunt. You’re not going to be happy this year, either. Take my advice and just walk away. Imagine I happened to vote for the five players you feel are most deserving. Your day will go better, I promise. For those brave souls that actually want to see who (and why) I chose, [click here](#).

Hello everyone. Thanks for taking the red pill.

If you’re unfamiliar with the Hall of Fame, you might want to check out [Brian David Marshall’s feature article](#) or the [Hall of Fame Home Page](#). The short synopsis is that I’m on the Selection Committee and it is my honor to vote for five candidates from a rather short list. Here are all the rules given to us: (well, relevant to my votes anyway)

Voting shall be based upon the player's performances, playing ability, integrity, sportsmanship, and contributions to the game in general.

It's up to each voter to interpret that as they see fit. (And no, I don't think players have to score well in all of the above categories to get on my ballot.) Okay? Let's get to my votes.

One last thing. These are my votes. While normally I am a spokesperson for **Magic**, for this section I'm just me, a guy who has been very involved in the Pro Tour and has strong opinions. Just remember, they're *my* opinions.

Instead of building to controversy, let's just rip the band-aid off this year:

Vote #1 – Mike Long

Why Mark, why? There is not a single thing that I have ever written in my column (and I've been at this for four and a half years – twelve years if you count all my writing before **magicthegathering.com**) that has gotten more negative mail than my vote for Long last year. People were violently upset. To some I crossed a line that should never be crossed. To others, I was the “face man” of the company reinforcing the worst aspects of the game. I read all my mail. I got tons and tons of heartfelt letters explaining how my decision personally upset them. So why am I doing it again? Because I cannot make my decisions based on other people's feelings. I have to make my decisions based on my feelings.



I know that many other people disagree with me on how I see the Hall of Fame. My response is that this whole process is subjective. As a member of the committee, I have the responsibility to interpret how I see the Hall. And here's how I see it. To me, the Hall of Fame is not some moral benchmark to reward the players that I see as living up to some standard that I want others to follow. As far as I'm concerned, it simply isn't. But please, I respect the fact that others see it this way. I just don't. The Hall of Fame for me is a living record of the people that made the Pro Tour what it is.

Like it or not, that includes Mike Long. In fact, when the idea of the Hall was first formed, before we even ironed out the eligibility criteria, I made a master list of who I thought belonged in the hall. Long was number three. Of all time. To me, Long had *that* much influence on the Pro Tour. And yes, this actually means I'll be voting for Mike every year until he either gets into the Hall or he gets removed from the eligibility list.

Now remember, each person selected for the committee comes from a different vantage point. My past with the Pro Tour came from being the guy trying to make the Tour exciting. It was my job to help craft and build personalities. I created the feature matches and the **Magic** Invitational. My job was to build stars. Mike was, by far, the greatest success. (I don't mean to imply, by the way, that I was working alone in star building – there were many other people working with me.) Note, that I'm not talking about Mike as a person. I'm talking about him as a marketing image. Mike, the persona, made people pay attention to the Pro Tour. Mike made people read coverage. Mike got butts in the seat for the finals. Mike made people talk about the Pro Tour. How the Pro Tour used Mike was the very definition of why sports build stars.

Yes, to borrow a wrestling term, he was a “heel.” You weren't supposed to like him. That was the point. We spent a great deal of energy turning Mike into the embodiment of everything that was wrong with the game. I should stress we didn't make him who he was. What we did was make conscious choices when and how to turn the spotlight on him. In addition, we decided what we did and didn't say about him. Why did we do this? Because to promote sports you need interesting conflict. To do that, you have to build personas that people want to root for and others that people want to root against. Then when you match them against one another, you make great drama. That's what we were doing. Making heroes and villains.

Mike was the ultimate villain. He understood the kinds of things we liked (and let me stress, I'm talking about behavior and attitude - we **never** told him to cheat and planned to DQ him whenever we caught him - in fact, the company that advised us on professional sports specifically told us that having players DQ'ed is great PR) and behaved accordingly. In fact, I believe Mike was the best villain the tour has ever seen. *This* is why I'm so adamant about voting for him. I want to see the stars of the game rewarded in the Hall and Mike was definitely one of the biggest stars the Tour has ever seen.

The thing that upsets me most is that I believe that one of the reasons that Mike is being excluded from the Hall is because of the ill will built up against him. I believe we (being Wizards) did a lot to help build up this ill will because we liked what he did for the game as a villain. We created a persona that I feel people now confuse with the man himself. Here's the irony. Outside of the persona, Mike has done more for the game than most people. He was a tournament organizer and judge for many years. In particular, he spent a great deal of time working with kids in his neighborhood. So much so that we came within a hair's breadth of offering him a job being the pro at Wizards of the Coast Game Camp. Why didn't he get the job? For the same reason that we didn't play up any of the things I just mentioned. We didn't want to play up the sympathetic side of our “greatest villain”. Even today, he's still involved with the game. People love to make fun of his methods, but in the end he makes his living trying to help people get better at **Magic**. I'm not saying the man is a saint (and yes, the man has his faults), but he has done a lot of good for the game.

Let's not gloss over his accomplishments. For starters, I strongly believe he is one of the most talented players to ever take up the game. I've heard agreement from numerous pros, even ones who hate him with a passion. He won a Pro Tour, a Grand Prix and a **Magic** Invitational. He was on a record three World Championship winning teams. If current point systems were used back in the day, he would have been the second Pro Player of the Year. In addition, he has four Pro Tour Top 8s.

But how do we know his real accomplishments? In my opinion, those are his real accomplishments. These were professional events. We had judges. Just as I think it's wrong for people from Seattle to claim that the Seahawks really won the last Super Bowl because so many bad calls went against us, I think that you can't undo history. Other than one Nationals (and he definitely should get dinged for it), Mike was never DQ'd from a premier event. In fact, Mike's warnings are far tamer than I expect many of you would be led to believe. As far as I'm concerned, history is as history stands. Yes, certain sports events would change if we could go back now, but that's not how sports history works.

To me, the Hall of Fame is no different than the feature matches or the **Magic** Invitational. I want it to represent the stars of the game. Like or hate him, Mike Long is one of those stars.

But enough about Mike. I actually have four other lucky folks to vote for.

#2 – Mark Justice

Three of my five votes last year made it into the hall. The incoming crop of candidates did not provide four more worthy candidates (in my humble opinion) than my leftover two, which means that for a second year in a row, I am also voting for Mark Justice. Why? Because Mark Justice was the game's first superstar. He was one of the reasons that we believed this whole Pro Tour thing might just work. Justice's star started rising when he won the '95 U.S. National Championships (defeating Henry Stern) followed by a semi-final finish at the '95 World Championships and sailed through the first few years of the Pro Tour. While he only played three seasons, he racked up four Top Eights, finishing second on two occasions.

As I explained last year, only a handful of players have ever dominated the game by such a margin that everyone acknowledged them as the top player. By my count there have been four – Justice, Rade, Finkel and Budde. Rade and Finkel were inducted last year and Budde is a shoo-in when he becomes eligible next year. That leaves Justice.

I'm a sucker for historical relevance, so the pioneer of **Magic** celebrity and the very first **Magic** superstar is a no-brainer for me. I only wonder what would have happened if Mark hadn't peaked so early in the Pro Tour's existence.

#3 – Bob Maher

In my mind, Bob is easily the most qualified member of the incoming players on the year two ballot. Pro Tour winner? Check. Multiple Grand Prix winner? Check. Pro Player of the Year? Check. Invitational winner? (There's no person on this planet that values this honor higher than me.) Check. Does he have a nickname that implies worthiness to be in the **Magic** Hall of Fame? "The Great One", check. Not much else for me to say.

#4 – Scott Johns

I agonized over my last two votes. By my count, I believe there are sixteen players on the current ballot that I can see myself voting for (and there's another ten who, while I might not vote for them, I wouldn't be upset to see them inducted). It's tough, tough competition. In the end, I decided to push my last two votes towards things I care about. Scott gets my vote for doing two things. First, being worthy of even being considered. Scott is one of a handful of players to have five Pro Tour Top Eights – three of which were done back-to-back-to-back (the first person to ever to accomplish this feat – and you know how I love those firsts). Scott even has a Pro Tour victory under his belt.

But that alone wasn't enough to seal the deal for me. What pushed Scott in front of a number of other very worthy players was what he's added to the game/Pro Tour. Long before Scott became the editor of **magicthegathering.com**, he was on other websites revolutionizing how the Pro Tour, and even more importantly the PTQ seasons, were handled on **Magic** web sites. He brought the experts to the people and set up a style of dialogue that continues today. On top of that he was a very influential writer that helped reshape how players thought about high-level play. Scott was a Pro Tour star that helped the other Pro Tour stars shine brighter and helped map out for the struggling PTQ players how one could make it to the Pro Tour. It is this influence on both sides of the stage that make him my fourth vote.

#5 – Chris Pikula

One of the things that upset me most last year was how my vote for Mike Long was interpreted as my not caring about the integrity of the Pro Tour. I care very much. So much so, that I realized that it was important to this year vote a yin for Long's yang. Chris embodies everything that is good about the Pro Tour. He stood up for honesty when it wasn't the popular thing to do. And he did so as charismatically as was possible.

If Mike was the player people loved to hate, Chris was the one they loved to love. Chris made the game fun by making you enjoy watching him play. And when he wasn't playing, he made you want to watch it to hear what he was going to say about it as one of the best commentators we ever had. This is why Chris got invited year after year to the **Magic** Invitational. This isn't to say that Chris was a slouch when it came to Pro Tour play. He had three Pro Tour Top 8s (and he was one poor play away from four), a number of Grand Prix Top 2s, and, of course, possibly the best **Magic** Invitational win ever.

This slot almost went to Gary Wise, who is also very deserving and someone who I hope finds his way to the Hall one of these years. But in the end, I couldn't escape the joyfully irony of Mike Long pulling Chris Pikula onto my ballot. The rivalry between these two is the kind of thing a promoter can only dream of. How could they not share the same ballot?

Gimme Five

Once again, here are my five votes for this year's Hall of Fame:

- #1 – Mike Long
- #2 – Mark Justice
- #3 – Bob Maher
- #4 – Scott Johns
- #5 – Chris Pikula

Now let the Mark-bashing begin.



*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](#)

