

Home > Games > Magic > Magicthegathering.com > Columns



The Great Mix-Up, Part I

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Making Magic
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The prerelease is over and *Planar Chaos* is finally public knowledge. But, I understand that some players wish to see the cards for the first time when they start cracking open packs. To all of my readers out there who fall into this camp, I salute you and I warn you to turn away now. Come back next week and read this column then. I'm going to be talking about a fundamental aspect of the set and it would sadden me if I accidentally ruined anything for you. Bye, see you next week.

Okay, for everyone else, I'm going to use my column today to address one of the biggest questions I've been getting: What is thing X doing in color Y? Yes, today I'm going to walk through some of the color swapping madness (there was too much for a single article – Part II will be in two weeks) and explain why we shifted the things we did. As you will see, there was a clear method to our madness.



Making Room for Pie

As I explained in my very first *Planar Chaos* preview column ("[Chaos Theory](#)"), the *Planar Chaos* design team was interested in examining what things could have been done with the color pie that weren't. We wanted to explore the mantle and crust of the color pie (if this terminology is confusing, once again please go see "Chaos Theory"). What this means is that for each mechanic that we shifted in color we did so to match an element of that color's philosophy. Remember, *Planar Chaos* does not mess with the fundamentals of what the colors are about. The philosophies I spelled out in my columns on the colors ("[The Great White Way](#)," "[True Blue](#)," "[In The Black](#)," "[Seeing Red](#)," and "[It's Not Easy Being Green](#)") remain unchanged. *Planar Chaos* is playing with the mechanical choices made to represent those underlying principles.

For the first installment, I'm going to talk about the keyword and keyword-like creature abilities. For each entry I will explain where the ability exists normally and then where it has been placed in *Planar Chaos*'s alternate reality version. I will then provide the flavor explanation for each. Sound good?

Fear

Original Placement: Black
***Planar Chaos* Placement:** Red

Why Black: Black's philosophy says to use whatever tools are necessary regardless of other costs. This means that black makes use of creatures that would freak any other color out – so much so, that black has turned this bug into a feature. Black's willingness to use truly horrifying creatures means that often black is able to avoid pesky blockers by scaring them.

Why Red: Red has always had the ability to prevent blocking. This has been flavored through red's ability to inflame emotional responses in others. As the color that most embraces emotion, red has learned how to fan negative emotions in the enemy. Red's "don't block me" spells tend to be flavored through the use of creating panic in others. This is only a half-step away from fear itself. Note, though, that in *Planar Chaos* red doesn't technically use "fear" as it has changed the word "black" to "red." (As a quick aside, I personally believe we made a mistake when we keyworded fear. I would have preferred that the mechanic be defined as an evasion ability wherein the creature can only be blocked by artifact creatures and creatures of its own color. This would allow much more flexibility in using fear in other colors).

First Strike

Original Placement: White & Red
***Planar Chaos* Placement:** Black

Why White & Red: Because first strike is a combat mechanic, it was given to the two colors that most embrace fighting – white because of its militaristic bend and red because of its barbaric flavor. First strike in white



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is flavored as the advantage of military training. The fighters in white are better because they've been trained to be soldiers. First strike in red has been flavored as red's willingness to be overly aggressive. Red's first strikers represent natural fighters who've gained experience through picking a lot of fights. The ones who survive end up being pretty good fighters. They've learned through actual fighting experience.

Why Black: Black is the most opportunistic color. If something will give it an edge, black will use it. Black doesn't allow things like morals or "playing fair" to get in its way. Thus first strike in black can be flavored as black's willingness to fight unfairly. Black's edge comes not from training or experience but from underhandedness. I should note that this is one of the bigger stretches in flavor.

Flying

Original Placement:

Blue

Planar Chaos

Placement: No one

Why Blue: When Richard Garfield first created the color wheel, he did so by piecing together aspects from many different sources. He made use of some interesting symbology, including elemental forces. Air and water have long been



associated with the mind. One need only look at astrology to see that air and water signs are believed to connect to people who are very mentally oriented. This stems from the fact that air and water are much more fluid than the other two elements, earth and fire. This tie to the intellectual made a nice fit for blue. To support this flavor, early **Magic** gave blue many creatures of the air and water. Because it had so many creatures from the air, it naturally received a high number of fliers. Mechanically this also proved important because blue was the weakest creature color. To allow blue a chance to compete with the other color's creatures it was given one of the stronger creature abilities.

Why No One: The big shift in *Planar Chaos* was that no one was given the major nod in flying. Rather all the colors (although red the least) were given access to flying. This is most noticeable in green, where normally there is a great absence of flying. Why is this acceptable for green? Because the removal of flying in green was done more to create a contrast with blue than it was because green didn't have any flavor affinity with flying. In fact, as the color that oversees the animal kingdom, green philosophically has plenty of potential creatures that could have flying. The shift of birds and faeries out of green wasn't done because these creatures don't fit green's philosophy. It was done to be consistent with the mechanical choices made. If green was going to be the bad flying color then certain creatures had to be moved out of green. They weren't removed because they don't make sense in green.

Haste

Original Placement: Red

Planar Chaos Placement: Green

Why Red: The flavor of playing creatures is this: You (the planeswalker) summon creatures from the æther to help you out in your duel.

"Summoning sickness" represents the disorientation most creatures have when teleported out of their natural habitat and into your magical fight.

These creatures need a moment to readjust. Creatures with haste don't have that problem. Why? Because they recover quickly. In red, the recovery is attributed to the complete focus of agenda. That is, red is so one-minded in its thinking that even being teleported to a new place doesn't slow red down. Once a red creature gets something in its mind (you know, like attacking), it's almost impossible to sway him from his task.

Why Green: Green is also very fast, and it too has a subset of creatures that don't take the time to do things like question their surroundings. For green, these creatures are the natural predators of the animal world. They're fast, aggressive and they run on instinct. This flavor of aggressive speed already exists in green. Instead of haste, though, it is played out through flash. In *Planar Chaos*, we decided to shift this flavor from flash to haste.

Regeneration

Original Placement: Black & Green

Planar Chaos Placement: White

Why Black & Green: Black and green approach regeneration with very



different flavors. In black, regeneration is about coming back from the dead. Sure you can strike a skeleton down, but it will keep getting back up. Green, on the other hand, represents regeneration as fast healing (think Wolverine for any comic fans out there). Green regenerators survive because they have the ability to heal their own wounds at a rate faster than the wounds can kill them.

Why White: White is about defense. White is about protecting itself and its guys. White has expertise in healing and damage prevention. It even plays around with resurrection now and again. White already has the ability to occasionally regenerate other creatures (usually through a one-shot spell or through an effect involving a creature sacrifice). Allowing it to regenerate itself is just a different way to play up white's ability to keep itself alive.



“Spirit Link”

Original Placement: White

Planar Chaos Placement: Black

Why White: White is the premier life gaining color. White also has an aggressive creature element. “Spirit link” allows white to put these two abilities together.

Why Black: **Drain Life** is a black effect. Someone takes damage and black gains life equal to that damage. That’s exactly what “spirit link” does. Black thrives off causing others pain. This fit makes even more sense if you realize that the “spirit link” ability first appeared on a black creature (El-Hajjaj in *Arabian Nights*).



Trample

Original Placement: Green

Planar Chaos Placement: Red

Why Green: Green is the creature color both in number (green has the highest percentage of creatures of any color) and size (green's average creature is bigger than the average of the other four colors). In addition, it has a very feral component as much of its creatures are mindless beasts. Beef plus ferocity equals a perfect fit for trample.

Why Red: Like green, red has a very mindlessly aggressive side. When red commits to an attack it does so whole-heartedly without any holding back because red doesn't bother to think about what will happen after the attack. No, that's far too much advanced planning for red. Trample is a good fit because it plays into red's sense of total abandon. In addition, mechanically it's an interesting fit as red tends to have higher power/lower toughness bodies.



“Untargetability”

Original Placement: Blue & Green

Planar Chaos Placement: White

Why Blue & Green: “Untargetability” is flavored differently in blue and green. Blue’s “untargetability” comes from blue’s ability to mess with the fabric of magic. “Untargetability” is treated as sort of a built-in ongoing counterspell. Green’s “untargetability,” on the other hand, is flavored more as a resistance to magic. This is why blue’s “untargetability” is often activated while green’s is just an ability on the creature,

Why White: White is very protective in nature. In addition, white has a very proactive quality. Many of its spells are designed to stop potential threats that might later show up. The difference between protection and “untargetability” is a thin one, and white could have very easily ended up with the latter if things had shifted ever so slightly.



Vigilance

Original Placement: White

Planar Chaos Placement: Blue

Why White: White is the most cautious of colors. While other colors rush into the fight, white tends to proceed with an eye on the rest of the battlefield. Vigilance represents this watchfulness, the idea being that a vigilant creature is aware enough to return quickly if it senses an attack coming.

Why Blue: Blue is the one other color that thinks ahead. Blue, like white, tends to plan out its actions before it acts. In addition, blue mechanically is able to untap itself. This is essentially just an activated vigilance, so granting vigilance to blue is not too much of a stretch.



“Web” (CARDNAME can block as though it had flying)

Original Placement: Green

Planar Chaos Placement: Red

Why Green: As I explained above, blue was made the major color of flying. This dominance of the air played nicely into the blue/green conflict, and thus green was made the dominant color of the ground. The offshoot of this was that green was made the worst color at flying. To balance this, green was given the ability to block fliers as a means to cope with the flying threats of other colors.

Why Red: Red is also the enemy of blue, king of the fliers. In fact, early in **Magic's** history red also had some anti-flying cards (such as **Earthbind** and **Vertigo**), but confusion with **Earthquake**-type effects that didn't hit fliers caused the designers to retreat a bit on the anti-flying flavor in red. Red has always been the second worst color at flying. It has very few fliers at common and uncommon. Only at rare when you get to big iconics like dragons and phoenixes does red have decent fliers. Red could easily have been chosen for the “worst at flying” position that went to green. If it had been, red would have most likely gotten the “blocks fliers” ability. Note that red treats its creatures with “web” differently. Instead of the lower power, higher toughness usually seen on green’s “spiders,” red has higher power, lower toughness. This allows red to destroy bigger fliers but almost always destroy itself in the process.



Keyword Play

I'll stop today with the keywords and other common creature abilities. I hope this gives you a sense of what the *Planar Chaos* design team was up to. If you enjoyed today's look at how these abilities colorshifted, come back in

two weeks when I'll begin examining how the spell mechanics shifted.

Join me next week when there'll be no time like the present.

Until then, may you take a step back to observe the larger picture.

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