

The Color Purple

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In a reality not far from the one we live in, a player slowly opens his first pack of [Planar Chaos](#), savoring the anticipation of seeing an entirely new set. His eyes hungrily devour the first few commons, appreciating the art, the ability, the power and toughness before moving on to the next. He's sliding the third card downward to reveal what's underneath, when suddenly he stops, taken aback. The color of the next card isn't white, or green, blue, red, or even black, it's... Purple?



Flash back nineteen months. The *Planar Chaos* design team of Bill Rose, Mark Rosewater, Matt Place and myself were sitting in a room, and the first order of business was figuring out what "alternate reality" means to **Magic**. As is always true at the inception of a set, these were exciting times - no suggestion was off limits, no matter how crazy, and at the end of the meeting we had a list of potential directions we could take.

Since there's no better source than the actual emails, I'll be quoting them liberally throughout this article (in the cases where we need to reserve an idea for the future, the text will be replaced with bracketed italics summarizing it). Here's an abridged version of the meeting notes that Bill distributed after the meeting:

From: Rose, Bill

Sent: Friday, June 24, 2005 9:22 AM

To: Rosewater, Mark; Place, Matt; Sottosanti, Paul

Subject: Crackle Design Notes 6-23-05

How do we communicate "alternate reality" with the common cards?

Color fixed cards - Wrath in Black or a White [Memory Lapse](#).

Color reflections - [White Knight](#), Black Knight. Targeting 2 pairs for each combo.

Choosing your own reality. Modal spells. X spells. Other ideas for choosing your own reality? Same color split cards?

Duality (in addition to color reflections). Some type of threshold trigger (not graveyard). Time triggers, like [Rukh Egg](#).

[New card type]. Does a small set provide the rules support required to do this?

Legends with radical shift.

A sixth color. Do we want to continue exploring this option?

"Color fixed" cards, of course, ended up being the timeshifted cards of the set (although [White Memory Lapse](#) was a development casualty), and they do a fantastic job of conveying alternate reality to players who've been around long enough to see the originals. Color reflections didn't end up making it, presumably because they've been in the game since Alpha, and hence didn't actually convey a message of alternate reality. Choosing your own reality was the idea that modal and X spells allow you to choose a reality by giving you multiple modes to choose from. This was rather tenuous, but it did lead to the inclusion of the charm cycle and the mono-red split cards.



Duality was the idea that one card could represent two realities through the use of a trigger condition. [Krosan Beast](#) is a good example of this, with its transformation from a lowly 1/1 [Squirrel](#) into a massive 8/8 Beast, and the hatching of [Rukh Egg](#) is another. Cute, but it didn't represent two realities so much as a change within a single reality, and it wasn't quite what we were looking for. "Legends with radical shift" is likely referring to the idea of having two copies of the same legend in the set, but with different subtitles and depicted in two different realities. So for a rough example, there'd be a red legend named "Kandor, the Warrior," but then there'd also be a white legend named "Kandor, the Farmer," and the art would depict the same person, with the idea being that we're representing two different potential paths that his life could have taken. This was sort of clever but was eventually deemed too subtle.

And then there were three innocent little words: "A sixth color." In my mind, the answer to "Do we want to continue exploring this option?" was obvious. In fact, the more I thought about it, the more excited I became. What better (and more obvious) way to convey alternate reality than to add an entire new color? No matter if you'd been playing **Magic** for three months or ten years, all it would take was a single card and you'd know that something crazy was afoot.

Plus, doing the sixth color in a set like *Planar Chaos* had the advantage of giving us the perfect excuse to stop immediately afterwards. One of the major drawbacks to doing a sixth color is that we fear that we'll be committed afterwards, because players will have decks based around that color and won't be thrilled by the idea that they won't be receiving any new cards any time soon. But this was the perfect opportunity to do it for just a single set, because once you left alternate reality and returned to normalcy, **Magic** would clearly be back to five colors again.

So I started thinking incessantly about the sixth color, and eventually created the following handout and sent it around to the team. It's a bit long, but hopefully a worthwhile read:

Ways to do a 6th Color

I think we need to play it straight. It's an alternate reality so we should pretend we've been doing this color for a while and it's exactly the same as any of the other ones. This means:

- Equal number of cards in the set
 - Mana works the same way
 - Feels like a real color
- Okay, how?

1. Able to do everything but not the best at anything

There are a number of problems with this though:

- Hard to make individual constructed quality cards
- If people only see a few cards they'll think the color just sucks
- Probably won't be worth splashing for the color

2. Give the color a bizarre identity that consists of a mix of minor abilities that have fallen through the cracks.

The key here is finding abilities that we haven't quite found a home for, or haven't done in a long time. -0/-X is a good example. Sample cards:

Target creature gets -0/-2 until end of turn.

Target creature gets +5/+3 until end of turn.

1/1, Tap: put a counter on target creature. Each counter gives +2/+1.

Take control of target artifact or enchantment.
Enchantments that tap
Token copies of non-creature permanents

3. Make the color work with time.

I think we might be able to make a color work with just the idea that it works with time. The color wouldn't be able to deal with anything permanently, but would instead just keep putting off its problems on the theory that it would win before it has to deal with them. So it would be very tempo-based. Sample cards:

Delay [suspend] target permanent
Adding or removing time counters
Enchanted permanent gains Vanishing 3
Reverse the turn order. You take the next turn.
Draw a card for each card in the delay [suspend] zone.
Choose one: upkeep, untap, draw, main, combat. There's an additional phase of that type after this one.

4. Take slices of the pie away from existing colors, i.e. divide the pie into six, keeping the other five roughly the same as they are now.



This works well with the alternate reality theme, since we're pretending this color existed since the beginning, of course it would have its own major mechanics.

For example:

From black - discard
From blue - countermagic
From white - lifegain
From red - haste
From green - trample

And then we don't make any cards in those colors with those abilities. So we don't end up making any cards that we'll regret (nothing outside of our normal color pie) and we get some weird colors that people aren't used to but will still feel right.

5. Some combination of 2 through 4.

Could take pieces of the pie from other colors but fill it out with time-based cards, or fill it out with minor abilities like -0/-X.

The sixth color, as the most compelling direction to explore, quickly became our main focus. We settled on it being purple and decided that we could distribute lands by adding one as a sixteenth card to each pack. This was a deviation from the stated goal of pretending that there'd been six colors since the beginning, but it was inevitable because we needed a way to get the lands out to the casual crowd. In Limited drafts and tournaments, you would be able to take as many of the basic land as you wanted (and presumably we would send them out to TOs). Here was my email from the end of the day after we discussed the handout:

From: Sottosanti, Paul
Sent: Thursday, June 30, 2005 5:40 PM
To: Rose, Bill; Place, Matt; Rosewater, Mark
Subject: Purple

It looks like option 4 is the most promising (take slices of the pie away from existing colors). We add purple in between blue and black on the color wheel, and colors like their neighbors and hate the color directly across from them. They could also dislike the other colors, or that could be a neutral relationship. The basic land would be [Cave], and it would probably be a 16th card in each pack.

So you have:

WUPBRG

Direct enemies:



W and B (a plus)
U and R
P and G

We can change up the packaging to have all six colors, which will certainly catch people's eye when they see it in a store. Obviously we can't change the card back.

Cool, this is exciting space to explore. :)

Now that we'd decided to try purple, the first order of business was, as always, making the cards. Obviously, the color had a huge inherent disadvantage, both in Limited (where it only existed in 1 out of the 3 packs) and Constructed (where it would have fewer cards than the other colors and no dual lands), so we looked at this as a chance to print and/or reprint powerful cards that would excite people and give them a reason to try it out. This led to the following email:

From: Sottosanti, Paul
Sent: Tuesday, July 05, 2005 9:29 AM
To: Rose, Bill; Place, Matt; Rosewater, Mark
Subject: Crackle



Off the top of my head though here are some cards that are "too powerful to bring back" that might be exciting to reprint in purple, along with what it would mean for the color's section of the pie:

[Mana Drain](#) (countermagic)
[Fireblast](#) (direct damage)
[Hymn to Tourach](#) (discard)
[Rancor](#) (trample and creature pump?)

[Land Tax](#) (taxing)

[Land Grant](#) (land search)

[Sylvan Library](#) (deck manipulation)

[Dark Ritual](#) (fast mana)

The cards that really help to define the color, like the first three, seem better because their inclusion makes a lot of other cards make sense. If you include [Fireblast](#) the color should probably have three more direct damage cards and players start to get a sense of what purple is. But if you include Dark [Ritual](#) there might be not room for any more fast mana in the same set.

That said the other ones still seem like potential candidates.

Looking back, it would have made perfect sense to still have the timeshifted cards, but with some shifting into purple. Cards like Mana Drain and Sylvan Library would have fit perfectly. At this point, however, we had no idea that *Planar Chaos* would have a timeshifted subset, so these were just normal (albeit purple) cards in the set.

Although the team was far from convinced that purple was the right call, everyone was at least on board with giving it a try, so plans were set in motion for a set to be created and a draft to occur.

From: Rose, Bill

Sent: Thursday, July 07, 2005 2:17 PM

To: Rosewater, Mark; Place, Matt; Sottosanti, Paul

Subject: Crackle Purple

Here's my plan for experimenting with purple -

1. We design purple 10 commons, 6 uncommons, and 10 rares. Purple fits into the color wheel between Blue and Black - wuPbrg. Let's start with Paul's suggestion that Purple has discard (Hymn to Tourach) and countering (Mana Drain).
2. For this test the rest of Crackle - 10 commons, 6 uncommons, and 10 rares per color plus 4 uncommon artifacts - get created from Kamigawa block and *Onslaught* block cards. Purple should clearly be the strongest color.
3. Then we draft the test Crackle and 8th Edition to test Purple's effect on draft.

Over the next few design meetings we hammered out the core essence of purple. Discard was quickly thrown out and replaced with direct damage, mainly to keep purple from playing like a traditional blue-black control deck (ironically, this made it play somewhat like blue-red, the two colors that mix to create purple, but this was a coincidence). We also gave it two unique creature mechanics and hit upon the idea of making the 11th common slot always be purple. This would hardly be noticeable but would increase the number of purple cards in each draft



significantly.

From: Rose, Bill
Sent: Monday, July 14, 2005 9:48 AM
To: Rosewater, Mark; Sottosanti, Paul; Place, Matt
Subject: Crackle Update

Purple gets:

Countering - better than Blue. Only Blue gets X counterspells and [Force Spikes](#).

Direct Damage - second to Red

Anti-Enchantment - worse than White or Green

Purple is between Blue and Black - enemy of Green. Its basic land is City.

The set distribution of purple is 1/6th the set. (Equal to the other five colors.)

The booster distribution of purple is 1/6th the rares, 1/6th the uncommons, 1/6th 10 of 11 common slots, and 100% purple in the 11th common slot. In a typical booster draft, there will be 26 or 27 purple cards (from the Crackle boosters) and 18 or 19 cards of each other color.

When we tried our first playtest, we quickly realized we hadn't yet made purple contribute enough in Limited. Plus, with only countermagic, direct damage, and enchantment kill, purple didn't quite have enough to do (and it was the best at only one of the three). So we headed back to the drawing board:

From: Sottosanti, Paul
Sent: Monday, July 18, 2005 1:34 PM
To: Rose, Bill; Rosewater, Mark; Place, Matt
Subject: Purple

I've been thinking about how to make purple's spells more attractive for the next playtest. What I came up with is that purple takes one spell effect from each of the other non-green colors:

from white - enchantment removal (worse than white)

from red - direct damage (worse than red)

from blue - countermagic (exclusive)

from black - edicting (exclusive)

If purple had been around from the beginning, it would definitely have at least one exclusive ability, so blue doesn't get any countermagic at all in this set. Purple also takes edicting from black, and then dabbles in enchantment removal and direct damage.

One mana [Remove Soul](#) at common is very exciting for limited, and PP [Mana Drain](#) at rare is the same for constructed. The uncommon counterspell (two options below) is also very good for limited. The other spells are almost all playable in the maindeck and for the most part are quite strong.

CP1 - 1P - 2/1 [*new mechanic A*] (a two mana purple card is tough to play in limited, so I think it should be good)

CP2 - 2P - 3/1 First Strike

CP3 - 2P - 2/2 *[new mechanic B]*
CP4 - 3P - 2/2 Flying, *[new mechanic B]*
CP5 - 4P - 4/3 *[new mechanic B]*
CP6 - 5P - 4/6 Trample
CP7 - P - Instant - [Remove Soul](#)
CP8 - 1P - Instant - Choose one: counter target green spell, or destroy target green permanent, or destroy target forest (this would be a cycle of six, so it needs to be different from the existing R/U blasts)
CP9 - 2P - Sorcery - Deal 3 damage to target creature or player.
CP10 - 3P - Sorcery - Target player sacrifices a creature and an enchantment.
UP1 - 3P - 1/2 1P, T: Deal X damage to target creature, where X is the number of cities you control.
UP2 - 2P - 3/1 [Forestwalk](#) (green gets citywalker)
UP3 - 3PP - 3/3 Flying, *[new mechanic A]*
UP4a - 3P - Instant - [Counter](#) target spell and deal 2 damage to target creature.
or UP4b - XP - Instant - [Counter](#) target spell unless its controller pays X; or deal X damage to target creature.
UP5 - 4PP - Sorcery - Deal 6 damage to target creature or player.
UP6 - 2P - Enchantment - Creatures you control gain *[new mechanic B]*.
UP7 - 1P - Sorcery - Destroy target enchantment. Deal damage to controller equal to CMC.
RP1 - 1PP - 3/2 First Strike, *[new mechanic A]*
RP2 - PP - 2/2 Sacrifice CARDNAME: counter target spell unless controller pays 1.
RP3 - 2PP - 2/2 When this comes into play, target player sacrifices a creature.
RP9 - 2PP - Sorcery - Deal 4 damage to each tapped creature.
RP10 - PP - Instant - Mana Drain

An exciting bunch of cards, especially for Limited (you'll have to believe me when I say that the new mechanics were quite strong). We ran a draft with a cardset similar to this, and while I had tons of fun switching into purple in the last pack, other people weren't as sure. They had been told upfront that we were testing out a sixth color, and they expressed some amount of sadness when it wasn't as unique as they'd hoped it would be. Understandable, but my theory was that we had just advertised it incorrectly, which led to what would be my final email on the subject. Here's an excerpt:



From: Sottosanti, Paul

Sent: Wednesday, August 10, 2005 12:45 PM

To: Rosewater, Mark; Rose, Bill; Place, Matt

Subject: alternate reality + objections to purple

I've been thinking about purple and people's objections to it, which are mainly that people have been expecting a sixth color for a long time and they'll be really disappointed if it comes out and it doesn't have anything that's totally new or exciting about it.

I do think that's a concern, and I share it, but I think it's the wrong way to think about it.

I feel like for Crackle to be successful we need to really sell the idea of alternate reality, and I think that by far our most powerful way to do that is the sixth color. We can have six colors on the packaging, and maybe (if we can get Brand to agree) an alternate **Magic**: The Gathering logo as well, at least on the booster flow wrap if not the display. We would also need our marketing messages to be all about alternate reality, and not hype the sixth color at all, because that's been a part of **Magic** forever in this world. That way players don't come in thinking, "Oooh, there's a sixth color, I've been waiting for this forever, how does it work?" but they come in with "Huh alternate reality **Magic**, what exactly does that mean?" and we answer with a changed **Magic** experience.

All of our other methods for showing alternate reality so far are well and good (and we should do them), but at the end of day if we really want to sell that message and make the set cool I feel like purple is the way to go.

However, momentum continued to drift away from purple, and it soon became clear that it wasn't going to happen. Though part of me wanted to keep pushing, I soon realized that both Bill and Mark had individually decided that it wasn't a good idea, and as a designer you simply have to know when to quit and move on. There was still plenty of fun to be had with *Planar Chaos* design, from the playtests where every card was a reprint in a new color to the many offsites at Mark's house where we

lounge around, browsing through **Magic** Encyclopedias and throwing out idea after idea about cards that would be exciting to bring back in a new color. Check out [Mark's article today](#) to hear more about that process.

This was my first chance to be on a **Magic** design team, and I must say I really enjoyed it. Despite the game having been around for many, many years, no one around here is afraid to try out new and crazy ideas, as this whole experiment shows. And of course I'm happy to say that, thanks to the efforts of all the people who worked on the set, *Planar Chaos* did turn out extremely well. Hope you all enjoy it!

Would you like to see a sixth color in Magic someday?

- Yes! In fact, **Magic** should add a color permanently.
- Yes, but only temporarily.
- Only if the new color does something totally unique.
- No, **Magic** has enough colors as it is.

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