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The Great Mix-Up, Part II

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PRO TOUR-VALENCIA

Two weeks ago, I talked about the various keywords (and keyword-like abilities) that were color-shifted in *Planar Chaos*. Today in Part II, I am going to move my attention to “and the rest” (also known as the “Professor and Mary Ann” subsection). (By the way, thanks to all my readers who took time last week to write in to inform me that they knew when Part II was scheduled.) Just as with Part I, I will examine where the ability/mechanic fits in the traditional color pie and then I’ll look at how it fits in the *Planar Chaos* color-shifted color pie. Sound like fun?

Bounce (“Return target creature/permanent to its owner’s hand.”)

Original Placement: Blue
Planar Chaos placement: White (own permanents), Red (others’ permanents)



Why Blue: While other colors prefer action, blue is the thinking color. Blue wins not by force but by subtlety. As such, blue is kept from having any destructive properties and thus cannot destroy anything. (Cool factoid – each of the four permanent types is best destroyed by a different color: white for enchantments, black for creatures, red for land, and green for artifacts.) To offset this liability, blue was given a powerful tool, the ability to disrupt magic. The idea behind this was that blue, as the color that most scrutinizes magic, best understands how to stop it. Magic disruption plays out in two ways. First is the counterspell that disrupts the magic as it’s being formed. And second, it allows it to sever any magical ties that hold an item to the battlefield. This is what “bounce” represents. An Unsummon, for example, cuts the magical tether that summoned the creature to the planeswalker and thus sends it back where it came from. The wizard can always resummon the creature, but that takes time and resources that allow the blue mage opportunities to gain advantage.

Why White: One of the things the design team was interested in when shifting around mechanics was to find one or two that currently exists in one color but possibly could have been broken up and existed in two different colors. “Bounce” proved to be this mechanic. Why? Because the entirety of it didn’t make any sense in a single other color. But when you break it up into its two component parts – bounce my stuff to save it and bounce my opponent’s stuff to keep it from hurting me – the colorshifts become clear. White is the color of defense. White is the color that best protects its own stuff. Defensive bounce (my term for bouncing your own permanents) makes perfect sense. If white senses something of its is in jeopardy, one of the ways to save it is to disrupt the magic that brought it here to send it away from the danger. White bouncing the opponent’s things, though, felt much too aggressive for white. In addition, tempo advantage cards are scary to give to the strongest, most aggressive weenie color.

Why Red: Red is about short-term advantage. Red acts for the here and now. Red doesn’t think through what it’s doing. If it answers the current problem, good enough. Aggressive bounce (bounce their stuff) fits this to a tee. It gets rid of it for now. The fact that the creature will come back soon isn’t something red’s going to focus on. Remember that blue has counterspelling. This means that for blue, there is a plan of action after bouncing the opponent’s permanents. Red’s plan is just to use the opportunity to hit them again.

Card Drawing

Original Placement: Blue
Planar Chaos Placement: Green

Why Blue: Blue seeks knowledge. The library represents information (the knowledge of your library of spells). In addition, blue plays a slow, controlling game that ekes out its advantage in subtle ways. Card drawing (and card advantage in general) play directly into this style of play.

Why Green: Green’s major strategy is to collect resources and then overwhelm the opponent. The idea is that green uses growth as an offensive force. Currently in the game, green’s growth is reflected mostly through mana and creatures. *Planar Chaos* includes cards that play directly into this theme. In addition to building up resources in play, green also focuses in creating resources in the hand. Card drawing is just a new avenue to use growth to overwhelm.



Counterspells

Original Placement: Blue

Planar Chaos Placement: Blue, White

Why Blue: Blue believes that intellect is the ultimate trait needed to win duels. As such, blue chooses to win by outthinking its opponents. One of its favorite ways to do this is to mess with the very magic being used against it. Why go through the bother of fighting the result of a spell if you can simply mess with the magic being used to play the spell in the first place?

Why Blue & White: One of the things the *Planar Chaos* design team did when colorshifting abilities was to look for different ways to mix things up. One such way was to find an ability that rested in one color and stretch it to two. Counterspells worked perfectly. Because counterspells are such a core part of blue's identity, we felt it would be too hard to completely remove them. Instead we looked for a second color that could take over part of the counterspell repertoire. White was the obvious choice as white has a very defensive nature, even more defensive than blue. White is all about protecting itself and its "boys." (One of R&D's shorthand takes on white is "don't mess with me and my boys.") The trick is to figure out what aspects of counterspells made the most sense in white. Two things stood out. One, white is very protective of its permanents. This means that it should be able to have counterspells that are used to protect its permanents. Two, white is the taxing color. This means that white should be able to counter spells if the opponent is unable to pay the tax (usually mana).



Damage Prevention

Original Placement: White

Planar Chaos Placement: Green

Why White: White is the color of defense. White is the color of healing. White is the color that protects its own. White, in short, is the color of prevention.

Why Green: Green also has its share of healing. Most often it's expressed through regeneration or life gain, but green is "the creature color." It isn't that odd for green to have the ability to prevent damage. The flavor is even similar to white (the spells cause the recipient to heal at an accelerated rate), as both have healing qualities as part of their basic nature.



"Deflection" ("Change the target of target spell.")

Original Placement: Red (and to a lesser extent Blue)

Planar Chaos Placement: Black

Why Red & Blue: Red and blue are the two tricky colors. Red's tricks are more in-your-face and immediate. They have more of a trickster feel. Blue's trickiness is much more subtle and longer lasting. This divide has red doing the "surprise, something happened you didn't mean to happen" immediate and short-lived effects while blue tends to get the more permanent, longer lasting spells.

Why Black: Black is a big fan of manipulation. It does what it needs to get what it wants. Black's misdirection effects though are less of a quick gag than that of a well-crafted con. Black makes you think you know what you're doing by feeding you half-truths or full-bodied lies. This comes at a greater cost to black than it does to red or blue, but black is willing to pay the costs to get what it needs.



Dehydration Effects (“Enchanted creature does not untap during its controller’s untap step.”)

Original Placement: Blue
Planar Chaos Placement: Black

Why Blue: Because blue doesn’t have creature removal, it has to find over workarounds. One such mechanic is the use of **Dehydration**-style effects that keep creatures from untapping. The flavor here is that blue can use its resources to distract the creature in question. (With **Dehydration** in particular, the flavor is that you’re pulling the water out of the creature – as blue elementally speaking is the color of water – such that it is unable to fight. My two cents, by the way, is that the card makes the creature perceive that it is dehydrated rather than actually dehydrating it).

Why Black: This flavor is pretty easy to explain, because the game has already had it in Alpha. The card was called Paralyze. Like blue, black has a flavor of manipulation. While blue tends to warp perceptions of its victims, black has no qualms with just physically messing with them. Black will make use of toxins or poisons or whatever dark magic is needed to cause others pain. The flavor used in *Planar Chaos* is that black is using its magic to crush the spirit of the creature being enchanted. The creature is so sad that it doesn’t have the energy or desire to fight.



Discard

Original Placement: Black
Planar Chaos Placement: Blue

Why Black: Black uses whatever means are necessary. To black, nothing is off limits. With this in mind, black figured out that the easiest way to defeat another wizard is to attack his mind directly. Not in any subtle way but rather in a very direct, brain damage kind of way. Discard in black is represented as physical attacks on the opponent’s brain. A mage cannot use spells he or she doesn’t remember.

Why Blue: Blue also messes with the opponent’s mind. Unlike black though, blue does it by warping perceptions. Blue doesn’t destroy the opponent’s brain as much as it confuses it. Shifting discard into blue is playing into this mental manipulation flavor of blue. Black might lobotomize you. Blue simply makes you forget things. Blue doesn’t remove the memory as much as it keeps you from being able to access it. Note that discard and card drawing overlap in how they achieve card advantage. Blue having discard plays directly into its desire to seek advantage subtly over time.



“Gating” (“When this comes into play, return a creature you control to its owner’s hand.”)

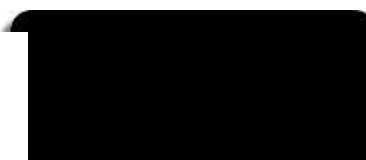
Original Placement: All colors
Planar Chaos Placement: White

Why All Colors: “Gating” was an unnamed mechanic from *Planeshift* (we did though use “gating” as an official nickname). It appeared only on multicolored creatures. The ability was spread equally throughout all five colors.

Why White: In looking for mechanics we could “fix” in *Planar Chaos*, we stumbled upon gating. We liked the drawback of gating but wanted to find a way to make the mechanic more positive. The answer was the use of flash (formerly known as “You may play this spell anytime you could play an instant”). By adding flash to gating, the unsummon turned from a mostly drawback to a net positive ability. Now you can not only get a new creature in play but you could do so at a time that would save the creature you’re returning to your hand. As I explained above with bounce, we wanted to move defensive bounce to white so this mechanic seemed to want to follow suit. The flavor is that white is using its defensive magic to exchange an endangered creature for a freshly summoned one.



Giant Growth Effects (“Target creature gets +N/+N until end of turn.”)



Original Placement: Green
Planar Chaos Placement: Red

Why Green: Green is the creature color that wins through its offensive use of growth. Normally, by growth, green means that it increases some resource until it overwhelms the opponent. But growth can have a more direct application as well: Green can cause things to literally grow in size. This ability is particularly important for green because it lacks traditional creature removal. This means that it relies on using its creatures to deal with other creature threats. **Giant Growth**-like effects help win these kinds of fights.

Why Red: Red is king of the short-term gain. Red also likes short bursts of adrenaline. Giant Growth-style effects play into this mindset. The big difference in flavor is that red isn't making the creature any bigger. Rather red is infusing the creature with some kind of emotional stimuli. It's making the creature angrier or more passionate or more berserk. The change will be short-lived, but the quick adrenaline kick hopefully will be enough for the short-term needs.



Mass Creature Destruction

Original Placement: White, Black, Red
Planar Chaos Placement: Black, Red

Why White, Black & Red: White has the ability to equalize things (and yes, destroying all creatures is equalizing in its own twisted way). Black has the ability to kill things. Red has the ability to cause lots and lots of wanton damage. This means that all three colors have access to board sweepers.



Why Black & Red: The fact that white is number one at mass creature removal really boils down to a single card. Philosophically, both black and red should be just as good at killing creatures. *Planar Chaos* simply explores what if the top creature killing color actually had the best creature-killing spell. Just removing Wrath of God from white would knock it from number one down to number three.

"Pacifism" ("Enchanted creature cannot attack or block")

Original Placement: White
Planar Chaos Placement: Green

Why White: White is defensive yet doesn't like harming things unless it's absolutely necessary. **Pacifism** is the perfect tool to answer this problem. By eliminating a creature's desire to fight, it removes the creatures from the equation without actually harming it. The only problem is that if later magic removes this rejection of violence the creature is still around to cause trouble.

Why Green: Green is very divided over the use of violence. Part of green is feral and wild. This part just follows its animal instincts. The other part of green, though, is very serene and spiritual (this is the half that has the monks and druids). Moving **Pacifism** into green is tapping into this latter sentiment. To capture the sense of becoming one with the druid way of life, the enchantment allows the enchanted creature the added ability to tap for mana.



Power/Toughness Changing

Original Placement: Black/Red (+X/-X), Green/White (-X/+X)
Planar Chaos Placement: Blue

Why Black/Red: Both black and red are fine with “gain through pain,” black because it is willing to pay whatever cost to get the advantage it wants and red because it doesn’t think about the consequences of its bonuses.

Why Green/White: White and green view a battle in very different terms. Winning for them is all about survival. White’s avenue is strategic planning. Early losses are acceptable if they can lead to long-term gains. For green, it plays into green’s belief that the status quo will eventually overrun any opponent. If green can let nature advance unheeded it knows that the power of nature will win out. For these reasons, white and green will give up short-term power to guarantee survival.

Why Blue: Blue is about change. In the traditional color pie, blue most often changes itself. This is why blue is the home of the shapeshifters. Cards like Morphling use +X/-X and -X/+X as a means to change their own shape. *Planar Chaos* uses the idea of change more aggressively. If blue can change the shape of things, why not use it aggressively on others? If blue can polymorph its own guys, what’s to keep it from using the same magic on its enemies?



“Punisher” (“Do thing X or take damage/lose life.”)

Original Placement: Red
Planar Chaos Placement: Black

Why Red: No color is less subtle than red. So if red needs to do something that it can’t do in a straight-forward manner, it resorts to thuggery, Red starts bullying. As I explained punisher when it first appeared in the Odyssey block, it’s just red saying, “Do this thing I want or I’ll punch you in the face.” Red has no control over which choice is made (which plays nicely into red’s theme of chaos). It just threatens and hopes its threats work.

Why Black: Black is also a bullying color. Why? Because bullying works and black is willing to do anything if it works. From a flavor standpoint, black is less threatening than it’s blackmailing. It’s not a street thug as much as a member of the mafia. It doesn’t yell in an attempt to intimidate, rather it calmly explains what bad things might happen if you for some reason fail to comply. It’s interesting to note that more spells can prevent red’s damage than black’s life loss.



Raise Dead Effects (“Return target creature card from your graveyard to your hand.”)

Original Placement: Black
Planar Chaos Placement: Green

Why Black: Black messes around with forces that the other colors won’t touch. Death is one such force. Because of this, black is very much into necromancy. “Raise dead” spells and reanimation both play into this flavor.

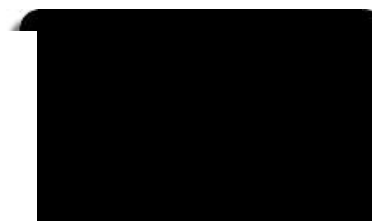
Why Green: Green is the one other color that plays around with death. For green, though, death is part of the great life cycle. This is why green is into recycling things in the graveyard. Besides, green is best at regrowth effects and is the creature color. “Raise Dead” spells seems like an easy fit.



Stealing Creatures

Original Placement: Blue
Planar Chaos Placement: Black

Why Blue: Blue is about control and mental domination. Add those two together, and mind control isn’t far behind. The key to blue’s mind control



is that it leads the controlled creature to think that it's doing what it wants to do. Blue merely persuades it to think in a way that's beneficial to blue.

Why Black: Black takes what it wants. In addition, it has no qualms messing with the minds of others. In fact, if you remove the right pieces of information it's not that hard to sway someone to your opinion. And if that doesn't work, just brutally attack their mind when they're not looking. It's underhanded and devious, but then, that's what black's all about.

Tapping Creatures

Original Placement: White
Planar Chaos Placement: Black

Why White: White is the color of strategy. White plans out its moves. In white, creature tapping is flavored as white strategically removing threats. For example, the first tapper, *Mirage's Master Decoy*, was flavored as a soldier that led individual enemies astray.

Why Black: *Planar Chaos* taps into black's flavor of manipulation. Just as black can steal creatures or misdirect spells, it has the ability to affect how individual creatures act. Like white, black is able to maneuver the opponent's creatures except rather than lead them off chasing a false lead, it sets out traps for them to walk into.



Mixing It Up

Whew! When I first came up with the idea of a column that explained all the color-shifting, I had no idea how long it would be (for example, I didn't know it was going to be a two-parter until I was well into the initial column). I think I hit most of the major shifts although I'm sure I missed a couple (and I trust my faithful readers to let me know what I missed). The important point of this two-parter is to let you have some idea of the thought processes behind the swaps. If nothing else I'd like you all to realize that the *Planar Chaos* design team wasn't sitting in a room with a dart board and some cards. (As *Unglued* taught us, **that's the DCI.**)

Join me next week when hint at things that may or may not be true.

Until then, may you try flavoring your food in a slightly different manner.

Mark Rosewater

TALKBACK

Today I'm starting a new feature that will run in many of my columns. I often ask for feedback in my column. I've noticed whenever I do I get a spike of responses. With this in mind, I've decided to start using my mailbox to get specific answers to questions that I or R&D as a whole have been pondering. Here's how it's going to work: From time to time I'll post a TALKBACK and ask a specific segment of the audience a specific question. Then anyone who falls into that subset is encouraged to reply. I'm hoping this will prove to be a good information-gathering tool, which in turn will help me (and R&D) better do my/our job, which in turn will create a better game for all of you. Sound good?

Let's begin. Please remember that I'm really looking for replies from people that fall into the particular subset. Here we go:

Player Subset: Players who've been playing for less than a year
Question: What do you think of *Time Spiral* block's nostalgia theme?

I look forward to seeing what replies I get. By the way, I always welcome anyone and everyone to write to me. I actually read every letter sent to me, although I do not have the time or resources to mail back the vast majority of the letters.

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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