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Dawn of a New Day



It slices! It dices! It makes Julienne fries!

Mark Rosewater · Making Magic
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Welcome to the first week of the *Fifth Dawn* previews! I have a pretty cool preview card for you, but I want to wait until I set it up properly. Please don't peek ahead as I think it will be a much cooler reveal if I set it up first.

The Design Team

Before I get to how *Fifth Dawn* was designed, I'd like to start by introducing the *Fifth Dawn* design team.



Mark Rosewater (lead)

You may remember Mark from such set designs as *Tempest*, *Mirrodin* and *Unglued*. As one of the veteran designers in R&D, Mark is often the one to lead untraditional/experimental design teams. *Fifth Dawn* was one such team. You see, from time to time, new designers have to be tested out. Nothing shows **Magic** design potential like actual **Magic** design. The *Fifth Dawn* design team was assembled to find some new blood. (Okay, enough talking in third person.)



Randy Buehler

Randy was the second most experienced team member having had the opportunity to work on the *Apocalypse* design team. Randy wanted to be on the team as he was interested in learning more about the design process. He and I would later go on to work on another design team together (*Unhinged*). For those three or four of you out there that don't know who Randy is, he is currently the Director of **Magic** R&D, overseeing all of R&D's work on **Magic**.



Aaron Forsythe

At the time of *Fifth Dawn*'s design, Aaron was in charge of **magicthegathering.com**. Both Randy and I thought it would be an opportunity for him to get an insider view of **Magic** design. He could use this knowledge to improve the behind-the-scenes coverage on the site. Little did we know that he would become the next up-and-coming **Magic** designer. To use a hackneyed baseball metaphor, Aaron hit the ball out of the park. So much so that his work on *Fifth Dawn* design was one of the key factors that led to R&D offering him a job. Aaron is now working on the design for Control (the large fall expansion of 2005) and looks to be a real power player in future **Magic** design.

Team Member #4

We wanted four members for the team. Unfortunately, R&D was swamped with work and no one else was available. What were we to do? And then the answer came from the most unlikely of places.



Gregory Marques

Who? I assume Greg's is not a name you'd recognize. You see Greg has never worked on **Magic**. In fact, Greg doesn't even work in R&D. For that matter, he is not employed by Wizards of the Coast. This is the point where if I was a boy named Willis, you'd be asking me what I'm talking about. (If you don't get that reference, you're just not watching enough old bad sit-com reruns.)

I met Greg at Pro Tour Chicago 2003. (The one Kai Budde won. The one in Chicago that Kai Budde one. The one in Chicago that Kai Budde won that was Rochester draft.) Greg was there with a large sign intent on showing off and playing with his homemade cards to anyone who would look at them. As always, I was interested in taking a peek, but as I explained before in this column, I've been instructed for legal reasons not to look at unsolicited material. If this were any other Pro Tour, the story would have ended here.

But luck was with Greg as Wizards' chief legal counsel had chosen to attend a Pro Tour to see what it was like. After watching Greg show off his cards for three days straight, I was moved enough to ask our lawyer if there was any way to take a look at Greg's work. She did her legal magic and I was allowed a rare chance to sit down and look at the work of a novice designer.

A quick aside before I get to my reaction to Greg's work (although it's safe to assume I didn't hate it). I have the opportunity to occasionally look at solicited material. And you know what? Whenever I do, it gives me a great sense of job security. Because **Magic** design is not as easy as it looks. As a result of seeing the amount of "amateur" design as I have, I've become a bit pessimistic when I'm asked to look at the work of a novice designer.

That brings us back to Greg. So Greg and I played a few games with his homemade set. My impressions of the mechanics? So so. Of the individual cards? Nothing that wowed me. The overall set? Better than average, but nothing special. Huh? While the individual cards did not impress me, I was taken back by the process through which he designed them. I could tell by looking at his cards that Greg had a very unique take on the game. While I wasn't always happy with his answers, I was quite impressed at the questions he asked during design. In short, I felt that Greg was a diamond in the rough. He had good raw design instincts but not the training necessary to harness it.

So when Designer X dropped out of *Fifth Dawn* design, Greg popped into my mind. It's not often you find someone with good design instincts. I mentioned this to Randy and he suggested that we add Greg to the team. But he lives on the other side of the country, I explained. So, we'll try running a design team through e-mail. If *Fifth Dawn* was going to be an experimental design team why not make a really experimental design team.

I wrote to Greg and asked if he'd be interested. I'm not sure how exactly he left skid marks in cyberspace, but Greg responded as quickly as I've ever seen anyone respond. Oddly, he appeared to be interested. And thus, we had our team.

“If You Build It...”

I started *Fifth Dawn* design by having the design team look back at all the artifacts we've ever printed. I asked three simple questions:

1. What are your favorite artifacts of all time?
2. What are your favorite kinds of artifact decks? and
3. Which of these has not yet been represented in the *Mirrodin* block?

As we pored through all our answers, we found that there was one particular artifact archetype that wasn't yet well represented – the machine deck. Now I'm sure some of you are asking, what is a machine deck? A machine deck is a deck that is comprised of a bunch of pieces (usually artifacts) that when put into play together combine to make a “machine” capable of repeatedly doing a number of different large effects.

As we talked about machine decks, we realized why *Mirrodin* and *Darksteel* hadn't pushed the envelope. Machine decks at their core are combo decks. And combo decks have the potential to be very scary. But *Fifth Dawn* was the last expansion of the block. If we were ever going to dip or toe into the “machine deck pool” now was the time. We talked to the rest of R&D and got the thumbs up.

Now it was simply a matter of figuring out what the machine decks needed. After some discussion, we realized that almost all of them had three key components.

Mana Producers

The goal of a machine deck is to build a machine. To do that, you need to get cards in play. And to do that, you need mana. And then once the machine is built, you often need mana to make the machine run. This calls for permanents that can routinely produce large amounts of mana (or allow existing resources to produce large amount of mana). Famous examples of this category from the past: the Urzatron (*Urza's Mine*, *Urza's Power Plant*, and *Urza's Tower*), *Gauntlet of Might*, *Mana Flare*, and *Candelabra of Tawnos*.

The *Fifth Dawn* team made sure to include a number of these types of cards in the design. There's even one rare card (which I'm not previewing today) that for a single locked activation cost has the ability to potentially add more mana to your mana pool than any other artifact ever created.

Engines

Every machine needs an engine. In **Magic** terms, what I mean by engine is a card that allows a player to convert one resource into another. Usually in machine decks there are multiple engines that work well with one another. Examples of famous past engines: **Cadaverous Bloom**, **Earthcraft**, **Necropotence**, **Ashnod's Altar** and **Mind Over Matter**.

As you can see, engines are the kind of cards that you can build decks around. In addition, the ability to covert resources is a powerful one. This is why engines have the highest percentage of any style of card to be banned or restricted. So, The *Fifth Dawn* team had the task of creating a number of new engines. And create them we did. Depending on how you classify engine cards (there's definitely some grey area) I think *Fifth Dawn* is a contender for the expansion with the all-time highest percentage of engine cards in the history of the game. Plus the engines in *Fifth Dawn* are represented not just in quantity but also quality. For example, *Fifth Dawn* has four artifact engine cards (also not being previewed today) that have a series of effects when they all interact together that has to be seen to be believed.



Spouts

So you have some engines and some mana producing cards. In short, you have a *lot* of mana. What can you do with it? That's where the spouts come in. Spouts are cards (almost always permanents) that allow you to (most often repeatedly) use any amount of mana. Examples of famous spouts: **Treasure Trove**, **Masticore**, **Rocket Launcher**, **Juju Bubble** and **Myr Matrix**.

As with the mana producers and the engines, the *Fifth Dawn* team knew we needed to make some spouts. And then I got a crazy idea in my head. What if I made a super spout? A spout that would give a player lots of cool options. And so I did. To keep a mob riot from forming, let me quickly state that yes this is the card I'm previewing. Here's what I want you to do. Close your eyes. Wait, read until I say the word "Go" before you do what I ask.

You realize that all of the people that closed their eyes right away didn't see that next sentence. That means they're just sitting there with their eyes closed waiting for something to happen. I'm not sure what they think is going to happen. But it is a funny visual.

Anyway, they have to open their eyes at some point. And then they'll read the next sentence.

Am I going to get a bunch of e-mails that say things like "so I sat there for an hour waiting for something to happen"? Probably.

Okay, before I preview today's card, I want you to close your eyes and imagine what a super spout would look like. Something that would make players go "wow" when they see it. Then while your eyes are closed, pull down the screen so the next section comes up. Then open your eyes and look at the preview card. I'm so confident in the coolness of today's preview card that I believe asking you to picture your ideal version won't make it any less cool. That's how cool I think this card is.



All that mana has to go somewhere...

In fact, when I was asked what card I wanted to preview, I specifically picked this card. I'm quite excited to show it off to you. So, are you ready?

Oops, Go!



So? Pretty cool, huh?

What will all of you do with it? As with many *Fifth Dawn* machine pieces, I have no idea.

This Is Your Life

Now that you've seen Staff of Domination, I thought it would be fun to show its humble beginnings. On March 27, 2003 (don't you love Multiverse records), I created the following rare card:

Gem of Awe

4

Artifact

- 1: Untap CARDNAME.
- 2: Tap target artifact.
- 3: Gain 1 life.
- 4: Untap target creature.
- 5: Draw a card.

My goal was to create a spout that had five activations with costs ranging from 1 to 5. To pull this off, I thought about how much I could get for each activation cost. And remember that I had to factor in the overall bonus of having access to so many abilities. I decided that this was worth around one extra mana.

I started by coming up with possible abilities: draw a card, tap a permanent, untap a permanent, gain life, etc. I lined the abilities up. I changed “tap a permanent” to “tap an artifact” to make it more block themed. In the end, I had a blank for the 1-cost activation. What could I get for one mana? Not much. Especially since I already said that the flexibility meant every activation costs about 1 more.

In the end, I decided to use an ability that seemed challenging to use: “untap CARDNAME”. Why would you want to untap this card? I knew there were other cards in *Mirrodin* block (such as [Lodestone Myr](#)) that could use the ability. And I was sure I could make a few new cards in *Fifth Dawn* (including my favorite engine card in the set) that cared. In addition, I found it amusing to watch people’s faces the first time they saw the ability.

During the next month of design, the team lowered the cost from 4 to 3 (because we thought it was cool and wanted it to see play) and then swapped the 3-mana and 4-mana abilities: (this is the version turned in to development)

Gem of Awe

3

Artifact

- 1: Untap CARDNAME.
- 2: Tap target artifact.
- 3: Untap target creature.
- 4: Gain 2 life.
- 5: Draw a card.

The development team decided that the second ability was too similar to another card in the set (An artifact repeat from long ago. Hint, hint.), so they changed the ability to tap target creature. Playtesting showed that the abilities were not properly costed, so the development team swapped “Tap target creature” with “Gain 2 life” (which was then changed to “Gain 1 life”).

Further playtesting showed that the card was still quite strong. Too strong. Aaron then came up with a brilliant solution. What if we added tap costs to all but the first ability? This would slightly weaken the card while also making the first ability actually mean something without another card in play. Everyone thought this was a perfect fix and we ended up with the card as you all see it today.

But Wait There's More

While that's all I have for today, please don't think that *Fifth Dawn* stops at machine parts. The set has a number of themes, the other major one of which I'll discuss next week.

So we have a really neat set with lots cool stories (you even have two columnists that were on the design team). Stay tuned as we mine *Fifth Dawn* for all its chewy center goodness.

Until then, may you have as many options in life as Staff of Domination gives you in play.

Mark Rosewater

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