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Here Comes the Sunburst



How to Add Color to the Game

Mark Rosewater · Making Magic
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If you're here to read about the job opening, you need to go to the end of the column. I recommend you get there by reading through column, but I'll leave that decision up to you.

Welcome to *Fifth Dawn* Previews, Week Two. Last week I talked about the "machine" theme that helped craft the *Fifth Dawn* initial design. Today I'm going to talk about the second major theme: five-color play. Not multi-color play mind you, but five-color play. What does that mean? *Fifth Dawn* includes numerous cards that encourage you to play spells using all five colors. You got a small glimpse of this theme last week in [Brian David Marshall's column](#) with the Bringer of the Black Dawn.

But the Bringers are merely a cycle of cards. Today in my preview I'm going to show off a new keyword mechanic – sunburst. What does it do? Why don't I let my preview card speak for itself:



In case the card is not clear enough, let me run you through the basics of sunburst. Sunburst is a mechanic that appears only on artifacts. When the spell with sunburst is played, the card looks at how many different colors were used to play it. If it is an artifact creature, it comes into play with that many +1/+1 counters. If it's a non-creature artifact, it comes into play with that many charge counters.

As you will see, sunburst is going to throw a wrench into *Mirrodin* block limited play (and perhaps even constructed). But this, of course, brings up an important design question. How exactly did a team of **Magic** designers sit down to create an artifact set and end up with a five-color theme? I'm glad you asked.

Color Me Badd

Some themes hit you in the face and others are a long, long journey. The five-color theme is clearly an example of the latter. The theme had its start in *Mirrodin* design. One of the difficulties of designing artifacts is making sure that they don't trample too badly on the color wheel. If an artifact does something better than a color, then you've moved the fifth place color up to the power level of the artifact.

The classic example would be **Nevinyrral's Disk**. One of blue's weaknesses has always been board control. If you block out the existence of **Upheaval** (as some members of R&D do), blue historically has very little access to restart buttons. But in early **Magic**, it did because of the existence of **Nevinyrral's Disk**. In fact, mono blue ruled the days of early **Magic** because it had the ability to sweep the board of any problem makers with the Disk.

This was a delicate balance all through *Mirrodin* design. One of the solutions the team came up with was to make use of colored activations. This led to the alternate cost convention (seen on the Shards) where artifacts had two activation costs, a more expensive colorless one and a cheaper colored one. While elements of this obviously ended up in *Mirrodin*, it ended up at a lower level than design had originally turned it in. As such, I went into *Fifth Dawn* design interested if we could recapture some of this design space.

This desire led me down the path of creating artifacts that had activations in two different colors. There was a cycle of artifact creatures, for example, that had two colored activations (with different abilities) where the two colors were allied colors. Thus, I first tainted the design group with the idea of multi-color affiliated artifacts.

Meanwhile, I had asked all the team members to brainstorm new areas to explore with artifacts. During our flurry of e-mails (it's interesting to note that this is the first design team where every key moment is captured in writing – this is the first time we ran a design through e-mail), Aaron Forsythe sent out a lengthy e-mail with a number of suggestions for new artifact mechanics. That post had the following snippet:

```
I don't know how to handle the memorization issue, but keying off the mana used to play an artifact might be a neat way to go. I guess you could keyword it...
```

```
Memory Stone
```

```
2
```

```
Artifact
```

```
Memorize (When you play CARDNAME from your hand, make note of the colors of mana spent.)
```

```
T: Add one mana of any memorized color to your mana pool.
```

```
Fluid Crusade
```

```
4
```

```
Artifact
```

```
Memorize (When you play CARDNAME from your hand, make note of the colors of mana spent.)
```

```
Artifact creatures get +1/+1.
```

```
T: All creatures of memorized colors get +1/+1 until end of turn.
```

```
Okay, maybe those aren't the best examples, since they'll probably play the same in every deck, and don't really encourage multi-colored decks. How about...
```

```
Paintball Villain
```

```
4
```

```
Artifact Creature
```

```
Memorize (When you play CARDNAME from your hand, make note of the colors of mana spent.)
```

```
CARDNAME comes in to play with X +1/+1 counters on it, where X is the number of colors memorized.
```

```
T: Destroy target creature that is a memorized color.
```

```
0/0
```

This card has some of the feel of Emblazoned Golem, which is another card that I really liked.

I'm interested to hear which of these ideas has promise...

And the fun began.

Making Memories

The team seemed intrigued by the memorize mechanic. So much so that each member started turning in new cards with the mechanic. And some of those cards (including Aaron's originals) were stuck into the next playtest. It took only one playtest with Memory Stone to realize the fundamental problem with memorize:

Me: I tap both my Memory Stones.

Aaron: What colors do they produce?

Me: Well, I played this one first, so red and, um... Okay, I didn't have the forest yet. Did I have the black myr?

Aaron: No.

Me: Then it's red and blue.

Aaron: And the other one?

Me: I know I used the forest on this one. And I assume the myr. So, black and green.

Aaron: You didn't have the myr. You dropped the myr turn six. You played the second Stone turn five. Remember, you played it and then dropped **Wizard Replica**.

Me: Right. Must be green and blue.

Aaron: No, you kept up blue for the **Wizard Replica**.

Me: That's right. Okay, green and red. (pause) What colors was the first one?

The problem with memorize was (shocker!) it required too much memorization. But Aaron had sensed this in his initial letter and had provided the answer. Paintball Villain, once you took away the memorize activated ability, was pretty clean. It cared about the colors but removed the need to remember the information past when you played it. The key rested in the counters.

Emblazoned Golem it turns out had what we in design call "legs". It was an elegant mechanic that had the ability to spread out to many cards. And best of all, it aged well. It was as cool in play as it was when you first saw it. Since memorize was no longer an appropriate name, we changed it to maximize (because the mechanic made you want to maximize your colors). Further playtesting showed that maximize was a pretty cool mechanic.

Syn-ergy City

With the success of maximize, we realized that the set was shifting from a multi-color theme to a five-color theme. As such, we realized that we needed to make sure that the block could support it. You see, the third set of a block is in an odd position. The most players will see of it in any limited format (barring the prerelease) is one booster pack. This means that it's hard to push a theme that will have an impact in limited. But the *Fifth Dawn* design team wasn't about to let that slow us down.

The key to doing this was twofold. First, we had to make the sunburst ability strong enough that it encouraged players to want to play all five colors of mana (and trust me for those skeptics out there, sunburst is quite potent in limited). And second, we had to make sure that all the expansions in the block helped set this up. As it turns out, by the time we figured out sunburst it was kind of late to make change to *Mirrodin*. Luckily, we had the cycle of myrs at common as well as a cycle talismans in uncommon. In addition it had cards like **Chromatic Sphere** and **Journey of Discovery** in common.

Darksteel, though was an entire different matter. *Fifth Dawn* design overlapped with *Darksteel* development. This meant that we were able to make some changes to *Darksteel* specifically to set up *Fifth Dawn*'s five-color theme. Here are some of the changes:

Viridian Acolyte and **Mirrodin's Core** – These cards already existed as is. All we did was tell *Darksteel* development team not to get rid of them.

Darksteel Ingot – There has been a lot of talk on the net about this card being common. Many players seem surprised by its rarity. Well, guess what? It used to be uncommon. The *Fifth Dawn* design team asked very nicely for the *Darksteel* development team to move it down to common. What can I say? We asked very nicely.

Vedalken Engineer – This was a subtle change that I asked for. Originally the engineer produced colorless mana. I suggested they change it to two colored mana of your choice. There was some concern that the card would seem odd. Why do you need colored mana to play and/or activate artifacts? I pointed to the handful of *Mirrodin* artifacts with colored activations. The colored mana, I said, was to activate those cards. No one would blink.

In addition to put five-color enablers in *Darksteel*, we put even more in *Fifth Dawn*. I can't tell you what they are just yet but when you finally see the full cardlist, pay attention to how many cards help you get access to additional colors.

Darts D' Art

So how did today's preview card come to be? Ironically, it also had its origins in *Mirrodin*. You see, I asked the *Mirrodin* design team (Mike Elliott, Brian Tinsman, Tyler Bielman & myself) the same questions I asked the *Fifth Dawn* design team (Randy Buehler, Aaron Forsythe, Gregory Marques & myself). The key one being what artifacts of the past did you like. A common answer was **Serrated Arrows** from *Homelands*. (It's not often that *Homelands* has entries to a "best" list.)

During *Mirrodin* design we came up with various **Serrated Arrows** tweaks. The card even led to a major mechanic that got cut during design (although one I expect to see the light of day eventually – it's good to be lead designer) In the end, *Mirrodin* got turned in without a **Serrated Arrows** variant.

Flash forward to *Fifth Dawn* design. We had just converted memorize to maximize and were looking for new cards. One of my posts to the team had the following card:



Serrated Darts

④

Artifact

Maximize

Ⓞ, Remove a charge counter from CARDNAME: CARDNAME deals one damage to target creature or player.

Sacrifice CARDNAME: CARDNAME deals one damage to target creature or player.

The idea behind the original card was that it had a weakening ability that could be used one more time than the number of colors used to play it. The reason the effect was “-1/-1 until end of turn” rather than a -1/-1 counter is that we've abandoned the -1/-1 counter in favor of the +1/+1 counter. Having both coexist causes confusion and R&D believes the +1/+1 counter is far more valuable (and can do about 90% of what the -1/-1 counters used to do, although obviously this card falls in the last 10%.)

But the team kept fiddling with maximize cards trying to find different ways to make use of the +1/+1 and charge counters. One idea I had was to create cards that wound down. The maximize (aka sunburst) would set the top limit and it would wind down with each use. That led to my second incarnation of Infused Arrows:

Maximize Darts

⑤

Artifact

Maximize - charge counters

Ⓞ: CARDNAME deals X damage to target creature where X is the number of charge counters on CARDNAME. Remove a charge counter.

Some members of the team weren't happy with the wind down version, so I tried a third approach: (Note by the way how the template for maximize got more exact as time went on.)

Maximize Arrows

③

Artifact

Maximize - Charge counters (This comes into play with X charge counters on it, where X is the number of different colors of mana used to pay its mana cost.)

Ⓞ, Remove X charge counters from CARDNAME: Target creature gets -X/-X until end of turn.

The idea I really liked about this card was that it had the ability to use up its counters in any amount that it wanted. If you played the card with three different colors, the card could destroy a 3/3 creature.

In the end, this is the version that got turned into development. The only change development made was to change the cost of the card from 3 to 4. Interestingly, I think this strengthens the card in limited and weakens it in constructed.

Taking the *Fifth*

One of the reasons that I'm so happy with *Mirrodin* block as a designer is that it does a good job of evolving as each new set is revealed. *Mirrodin/Darksteel/Fifth Dawn* drafts are a very different creature from *Mirrodin/Mirrodin/Darksteel* drafts (which themselves deviate a bit from the *Mirrodin/Mirrodin/Mirrodin* drafts). The common *Mirrodin* myr, for example, just keep watching their stock go up. I'm quite excited to see what *Fifth Dawn* does to all the various environments.

Join me next week when I explore *Fifth Dawn's* second keyword.

Until then, may you have fun exploring the rainbow.

Mark Rosewater

But Wait There's More

Hold on a minute Rosewater, you talked about a job in R&D. We want details!

Okay, let me answer a number of questions:

What is the job?

The job title is **Magic** Creative Writer. It is part of the **Magic** Creative Team and reports to the **Magic** Lead Designer (that would be me). The job, in short, is one of creative concept generation. In English, that means that it is responsible for helping to come up with the different creative elements (names, flavor text, card concepts, world development, etc.) for use in **Magic**. The job is *not* design or development although it does interact with the designers and developers.

What are the basic requirements?

You need to be able to relocate to Seattle and be currently eligible to work in the United States. In addition, you need to have the appropriate skills for the job.

What are the appropriate skills?

All the job skills are listed at the job's official listing in the [Wizards of the Coast Job Center](#).

What do I need to apply?

Follow the instructions at the [official listing](#). If you do not properly follow all the instructions you will not get the job.

Can I send my resume to you personally?

No. In order to apply you must apply through proper channels at the [official job listing](#).

When will the job be hired?

We are looking to hire as soon as possible. The position will be posted for just three weeks.

Are my chances improved if I personally e-mail you?

No. I apologize for being a bit repetitive, but I want to stress that e-mailing me is not the way to get this job. You need to go through the [official listing](#). I cannot give any further advice to potential applicants.

Good luck!

Mark may be reached at makingmagic@wizards.com.

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