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Mark Rosewater · Making Magic
Monday, May 17, 2004

Let's not waste any time getting to the preview card.



Last week I talked about sunburst. This week I'm going to talk about scry. Let me begin by getting the rules out the way first. How does it work? Since Paul Barclay spends so much time on the *Fifth Dawn* FAQ, let's just take a look at that:

Scry

The scry ability applies when a spell or ability resolves. The rules for scry (from the Comprehensive Rules) are as follows:

502.36. Scry

502.36a Scry is a static ability that functions while a spell or ability is resolving. "Scry X" means "Look at the top X cards of your library. Put any number of them on the bottom of your library in any order and the rest on top of your library in any order."

Condescend

{X}{U}

Instant

Counter target spell unless its controller pays {X}.

Scry 2 (Look at the top two cards of your library. Put any number of them on the bottom of your library and the rest on top in any order.)

* If a spell has scry 2, you look at the top two cards of your library and then decide where you want to put them. You can put both cards on either the top or bottom of your library in any order, or you can put one card on the top and one on the bottom.

* Follow a spell's instructions in order. All spells with scry in the Fifth Dawn set have scry as the last part of their text, so scrying is the last thing you do before the spell is put into its owner's graveyard.

* If the spell is countered, you don't get to use the scry ability.

* There is one card (Eyes of the Watcher) that has a triggered ability with scry. When the triggered ability resolves, look at the top two cards of your library and then decide where you want to put them, just as though the ability were a spell with scry.

Hopefully this will answer all your questions about how it works. But I know there's one question that the FAQ doesn't cover. The preview card has Scry 2. Are there any cards in *Fifth Dawn* that have a Scry number other than 2? Is there a Scry 3 or a Scry 4? No. Every Scry card in *Fifth Dawn* is Scry 2. Then why not just call it Scry and define it as two cards?

The reason we chose to use a number is the same reason we did so with cycling in the *Urza's Saga* block. For those that might not have been around back then, all mentions of cycling in the *Urza's Saga* Block were Cycling 2. When we brought the mechanic back in the *Onslaught* block, we started experimenting with other mana costs, including colored costs.

As I often mention in this column, R&D sees mechanics as reusable resources. Are there interesting things we could do with other scry numbers? Of course. But first time out, is Scry 2 enough? Yes. (As the Orb tells us, the word Scry appears nine times in *Fifth Dawn*.) Will we bring Scry back with other numbers in the future? Barring some problem with the mechanic that we didn't foresee, yes we will. When? I can't tell you everything.

It's My Party And I'll Scry If I Want To



So where did Scry come from? Like memorize (the precursor to sunburst), it came from the mind of Aaron Forsythe. Hey, I told you two weeks ago that he was the new up-and-coming designer. Here's how it played out. It was the middle of design. I sent out an e-mail to the team updating where we were. Here is a snippet from that letter:

Besides these two themes, we also need a spell mechanic from five to fifteen cards that does something cool for people that don't care about artifacts. It should be something we mention in the marketing. Think Wishes or Lobotomy spells. The mechanic can (and quite possibly will) be keyworded. It is especially important that it lends itself well to instants.

In response to this request, Aaron sent out a post that had ten suggestions for a new mechanics for colored cards. Specifically ones that could be used on instants and sorceries. This e-mail went back and forth as we all made comments on the suggested mechanics. Here is the section where Aaron first pitches scry (then called flow) along with Randy and my initial reactions.

7. Flow

Flow Growth

1G

Instant

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

Flow (As part of this spell's resolution, look at the top three cards of your library, then remove any number of them from the game and put the rest back on top of your library in any order.)

This one is pure Spike, and to Spike these cards are golden. I like the way this would play, as I am a "reduce the randomness" kind of guy. This is a "pure playability" mechanic, with no real flavor attached to it.

[Randy Buehler]

My favorite on the list so far, but that's because I too have my Spike tendencies. The audience that we're trying to speak to with this colored mechanic is the audience that doesn't want to play with artifacts. But Spike will be fine with playing with whatever is good so he's fine with artifacts. Thus I'm not sure a pure Spike/pure playability mechanic is appropriate.

AARON - I like it just 'cause.

MARK - I think I agree with Randy. This mechanic just isn't sexy. I think the colored mechanic has to have some splash which this mechanic doesn't.

The first impression of the design team was that we thought this mechanic was interesting but too Spike-y. That is that it only appealed to the type of player that enjoys very subtle strategic cards with incremental rewards. This brings me to a quick, but interesting, aside. Many people (including some people working here at Wizards) argue that there is no such thing as a Spike designed card. Spike plays what's good. Any mechanic can be turned into a Spike mechanic by lowering the cost or raising the effect until its tournament viable. This line of thought says that we do not need to design Spike cards. If we keep the power level even with past sets, Spike cards are created regardless of what the designers do.

My answer to that? Baloney! The player psychographics (see my ["Timmy, Johnny, and Spike" column](#) if I'm confusing you right now) talk about why players enjoy playing. Yes, Spike's motivation is proving his skills through victory, but this approach to the game does draw this kind of player to a certain aspect of gameplay. Spike enjoys breaking the game down to its components to figure out what makes it tick. Of all the players, he has the most appreciation for game theory.



Spike enjoys gaining advantage whenever possible. In a game with as many decisions as **Magic**, even tiny increments of advantage can mean the difference between winning and losing. This makes Spike much more attuned to things like card advantage and card utility. (The very simplified shorthand for these two terms if you don't know them – card advantage says “the player that draws more cards wins” and card utility says “the player that is able to set things up so they draw better cards wins”. – and for those of you that know the terms, yes, I know I greatly oversimplified them.) Thus, a mechanic like scry is right up Spike's alley.

Scry allows a player to essentially have better control of the cards they are going to draw and thus lessens the randomization of the card draw. In short, it adds more skill to the game. Spike loves adding skill to the game because he wants to increase his ability to win.

I'm Gonna Scry Scry Scry All The Way Home

When last we left the *Fifth Dawn* design team, we were examining the scry mechanic. The name “flow”, incidentally, didn't even last long enough to make it to playtest cards. (The rest of the team hated it.) Also it's interesting to note that all through design scry was spelled “scrye”. (Perhaps Control will create the Inquest mechanic.) Randy and I both liked the mechanic but were worried that it was too Spike-y. Aaron pulled an age-old designer ploy, “C'mon guys, let's just playtest them.”

And so we did. And you know what? It played really well. Really well. So much so, development would later change scry 3 (all the design cards were scry 3) to scry 2. That was when the team came to an important realization. This mechanic didn't necessarily have to be Timmy friendly.

We just needed to make sure that other elements of the set were Timmy friendly. (And we already knew Johnny was going to be smiling ear to ear.) Once we had this discussion, we agreed scry would stay.

This led to the next interesting discussion. What colors should have scry? Aaron was a fan of putting it in every color, but even he agreed that it seemed more natural in a color like blue than a color like red. Aaron's compromise was to have a common cycle but to then weigh scry more heavily in the colors that naturally do more library manipulation.

The design team bought this philosophy and turned the file over to development as such. The entire issue was brought up again in development, much more heated than in design. Who won? All I can say is look at the preview card.

When Doves Scry

The last issue I wanted to talk about is why scry is keyworded. Could we have made all the scry cards without keywording them? Yes, we could. The text for scry is not too unwieldy. But we felt there was value in keywording it. I spent an entire column talking about the value of keywords ("[Keyword To The Wise](#)") so if you want a more in depth view, please take a peek. For today I'm just going to talk about the value of keywording scry.

I believe a number of players might be upset by the keywording of scry for three reasons. One, it seems like such a small, meaningless effect to bother keywording. Two, the cards could be easily made without the keyword. And three, keywords are generally splashy and scry isn't. Let me address each of these points.

It's too meaningless to keyword – I think players will have a better understanding of the value of scry once they play with it. While it seems like a small ability, it's actually much more potent than I think some players realize. That said, I think no mechanic worthy of putting on multiple cards is truly meaningless.

The cards could be made without a keyword – There are plenty of keywords in **Magic** that don't need to be keyworded (threshold and affinity are recent examples). Keywords have a lot of value beyond just shortening the text. Rather than spell them all out again, just [go read my article](#).

The mechanic isn't splashy – One of the recurring themes of my column is that not every card is designed for every player. Scry is for Spike. What that means to Timmy and Johnny is that while the mechanic might not look all that powerful, it is. So if you want to indulge the Spike inside (and hey, although many players don't like to admit it, it's there) and give your deck a little extra consistency, give the scry cards a try. You just might find you like them.

Scry Beloved Country

And that is as they say, or at least as I say, scry in a nutshell. Hopefully this will give you a little better understanding of how and why scry came to be.

Join me next week as I dive back into the machine theme to take a look at the cogs and gears.

Until then, may you find ways to improve your own luck.

Mark Rosewater

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