



Witness Protection Program

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Swimming With Sharks
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In the days leading up to the unveiling of *Fifth Dawn* it seemed like I kept having the same conversation with everyone I know who works at Wizards. I was in San Diego doing event coverage for the Pro Tour where there was a rare Aaron Forsythe sighting. I congratulated Aaron on his move to R&D and the recent success of his pet card *Sylvan Scrying*. The topic turned to *Fifth Dawn* and Aaron asked me what I thought about the set. I explained that I was scrupulously avoiding the set spoiler so I could attend the prerelease with as little foreknowledge as possible of the new card.

Aaron smiled and rubbed his hands together, "I think **you're** going to really like it."

I had just had almost the same conversation with Mark Rosewater that ended on almost exactly the same note complete with cryptic emphasis and I was not sure what to make of it. Obviously the R&D crowd seemed to think there was something that would really strike a chord with me in the new set. The only problem is that I don't know what exactly they thought that was.

Don't get me wrong. I am very excited about the new set. I am just trying figure out what it was that R&D thought would so specifically speak to me. What was the card that I was really going to like? There are plenty of cards that really get me going but were they the same ones that Aaron and Mark saw me liking? The whole thing was very unsettling—not unlike going on a blind date with a girl your friend swears is perfect for you. Not only are you going to meet someone new but you are also going to find out how your friend perceives your viability in the dating world by the type of girl he sets you up with. It was not so much what I thought about *Fifth Dawn* but what does *Fifth Dawn* say about me? (Sadly, it may be a commentary on the bad mana bases of many of my Limited decks over the past year!)

The hot card at the moment for the Standard deck-building world seems to be *Krark-Clan Ironworks*. It is *Ashnod's Altar* and *Squandered Resources* rolled up into one potentially broken little package. Deck building conversations centered on this card go something like this:

Person A: "So, if I play this on the fourth turn with two one casting cost artifacts, two *Pentad Prisms*, and all artifact lands I can cast a *Fireball* for twenty-one."

Person B (shaking their head solemnly): "Not fast enough."

Yikes! Not fast enough? A fourth turn *Fireball* for more than your starting life total seems pretty saucy to me but apparently there are much faster possibilities. I have seen a number of different varieties using a number of different kill mechanisms. There is the *Disciple of the Vault* with two *Myr Retriever* kill. With one *Retriever* in your graveyard and another one in play you can create an infinite loop with *Krark-Clan Ironworks* since you can sacrifice the one in play for two mana and use the mana to replay the one you retrieve from your graveyard. With a *Disciple of the Vault* it is a small matter to kill your opponent. One reader sent in a version that included *Veldalken Archmage* so that if you got going with the *Retrievers* you could draw you deck until you found the *Disciple of the Vault*.



There is another version that needs less than twenty-one mana to burn an opponent out—at least initially. Once it reaches twelve mana it can play and activate a *Myr Incubator* removing all the land from your deck. You can then sacrifice the *Myr* tokens to play and activate a *Goblin Charbelcher*. With no lands left in your deck you will Belch your opponent out. Apparently this version can perform such antics as early as turn two. What is nice about this combo is that you only need to get to twelve mana initially to spark the engine into life with *Myr Incubator*.

The deck can win on the second and third turn with an *Ironworks* and there should be some version of this deck at a Friday Night *Magic* near you. (Model shown is equipped with optional *Bringer of the Black Dawn*)

Fast enough?

Krark-Clan Ironworks

Main Deck
60 cards

4 <i>Great Furnace</i>	4 <i>Bringer of the Black Dawn</i>	4 <i>AEther Spellbomb</i>
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RULES

4 Seat of the Synod	4 creatures	4 Chromatic Sphere
4 Tree of Tales		4 Chrome Mox
4 Vault of Whispers		4 Fireball
		4 Goblin Charbelcher
16 lands		4 Krark-Clan Ironworks
		4 Myr Incubator
		4 Pentad Prism
		4 Shattered Dreams
		4 Thoughtcast
		40 other spells

Shattered Dreams appears aptly named if there is a lot of Ironworks combo running around. I know that there are only four lands that produce black in the deck but when you add in the *Chrome Mox* (you have more black spells than any other color) and the *Pentad Prisms* you should be able to cast the artifact-hosing *Duress* on the early turns with some regularity. What is very scary to me about this deck is that a turn two *Bringer of the Black Dawn* would not be the killing blow. Still, his ability to smooth out your combo kill in multiple ways makes him a nice fit in my opinion. He provides you with four additional colored spells for your *Chrome Mox*, tutors up the last piece of the combo, and softens up your prey with five points of trampling goodness that makes your fireball requirements a little less demanding.

I don't know if that was the card that Aaron and Mark were thinking about when we discussed *Fifth Dawn* (actually I would love to know what Aaron and Mark and company were thinking about when they designed *Krark-Clan Ironworks* but that is beside the point and it's still early anyway of course) but I suspect that it is not.

One of my favorite cards of all time remains *Gaea's Blessing*. Not only do I love reusing cards over and over again but I love the cantrip ability of the card. For as long as the card was in Standard I played a deck based around *Gaea's Blessing* that would cycle through as many *Wraths*, *Gerrard's Wisdoms*, and *Armageddons* as I needed to wear down my opponents. When the card slipped into Extended my friend and Monkey Dog teammate Eric Kesselman played a version of the deck to a Top 8 finish at an Extended PTQ at Neutral Ground. His version replaced *Wrath of God* with the more mana efficient *Swords to Plowshares* and was an unwieldy 62 cards but it still brings a smile to my face whenever I think of the deck.

Main Deck		Sideboard
62 cards		
1 City of Brass	4 Arcane Denial	1 Boil
1 Quicksand	2 Armageddon	1 Disenchant
1 Reflecting Pool	4 Counterspell	2 Engineered Plague
1 Savannah	2 Disenchant	4 Force of Will
4 Tropical Island	2 Engineered Plague	2 Howling Mine
4 Tundra	2 Gaea's Blessing	1 Pursuit of Knowledge
4 Underground Sea	2 Gerrard's Wisdom	4 Turnabout
3 Undiscovered Paradise	2 Howling Mine	
19 lands	4 Impulse	15 sideboard cards
	3 Mind Stone	
	3 Mox Diamond	
	3 Propaganda	
0 creatures	2 Pursuit of Knowledge	
	2 Swords to Plowshares	
	2 Sylvan Library	
	4 Winter Orb	
	43 other spells	

Although Wizards has seen fit to stitch together *Krark-Clan Ironworks* from the parts of dead combo decks they have never reprinted anything that was quite like *Gaea's Blessing*. The advent of *Fifth Dawn* does allow for a little Dr. Frankensteining of my own though and for the brief period of time that the *Onslaught* Block is sharing space with *Mirrodin* block in Standard I will be *Wrath of Godding* and Oxidizing at will thanks to the *Eternal Witness*.

I suspect that the *Eternal Witness* and the lesser-powered cog cards were the aspect of *Fifth Dawn* Aaron was referring to when we spoke. I absolutely love them—*Trinket Mage*, *Leonin Squire*, and *Auriok Salvagers* are among my favorite cards to draft in the new set. Earlier in the week I drafted with my friends and was passed a *Salvager*. I quickly started drafting cog cards and was able to pull off all sorts of tricks. I had *Razorgrass Screen* to combo with *Moriok Rigger* and *Spawning Pit*, *Conjurer's Bauble* to act as a *Whispers of the Muse*, and the *Thawing Glacier*-like *Wayfarer's Bauble* to boot.

When you see how powerful those cards are with one and zero casting cost artifacts you can quickly appreciate the restriction that was placed upon the casting cost of the cards you can return. It should also give you an idea of how outclassed they are in the power department when



compared to **Eternal Witness**. Not only can she return any casting cost card to your hand from your graveyard but it doesn't even need to be an artifact. Like many people that wrote in this past week my first thought was **Astral Slide**.

With **Astral Slide** and **Eternal Witness** you can basically trade in any cycling card in your hand for any card in your graveyard or even the cycling card itself. There is no need to pay five for your just-cycled **Eternal Dragon**, just wait until your **Eternal Witness** comes back and retrieve it to use again. I was especially excited about the prospect of playing her in deck with my favorite cycling card of all time, **Krosan Tusker**. If you can cycle a Tusker to target your **Eternal Witness** with **Astral Slide**—say after blocking and putting damage on the stack—it is essentially a green **Ancestral Recall**.

It is especially exciting with utility cards like **Wrath of God**. You can cycle a card to remove your **Eternal Witness** from the game and cast **Wrath of God**. At the end of the turn when the **Eternal Witness** returns you get to pick up the **Wrath of God**. The same is true of **Oxidize** in the artifact matchup (and eventually true of **Akroma's Vengeance**) and **Scabbling Claws** in the Goblin Bidding and mirror match.

Here is the build I am currently testing. I experimented with **Break Asunder** at first since I could cycle it and get it back but with crazy artifact decks running around you need to have **Oxidize**. You probably want Shamans in the sideboard as well. **Gilded Light** may also be just the ticket against the Krark-Clan Ironworks deck. This build currently has twenty-four cards that cycle and three cards that draw you a card. Of course, with an **Eternal Witness** and an **Astral Slide** you can cycle/play them all as many times as you want each game. Over the next week or so as the meta-game for the post-**Fifth Dawn** (post-**Skullclamp**) Standard evolves I will be tinkering with the numbers and looking for the right blend of cycling and non-cycling cards and seeing if it has what it takes to keep up with the new bully on the block.



She remembers every word spoken, not to mention every spell you've cast...

Witness Protection Program		
Main Deck 60 cards		
7 Forest	2 Eternal Dragon	2 Akroma's Vengeance
7 Plains	4 Eternal Witness	4 Astral Slide
4 Secluded Steppe	3 Krosan Tusker	3 Decree of Justice
4 Temple of the False God		3 Gilded Light
4 Tranquil Thicket	9 creatures	4 Oxidize
26 lands		3 Renewed Faith
		2 Scabbling Claws
		4 Wrath of God
		25 other spells

Once the deck is rolling there is little that your opponent can do to disrupt you short of removing the **Astral Slide** itself from the game with **Altar's Light**. I don't know if you remember how difficult it was to play against **Astral Slide** decks when they had access to **Auramancer** to get back their **Astral Slides**. Or when they would go off with a **Cartographer**? Well, now they can have **Auramancer**, **Scrivener**, **Cartographer**, **Anarchist**, and the long neglected **Treasure Hunter** rolled up into one titillating package. **Decree of Justice** every turn is just the kind of broken *I* love. Hopefully it is not too slow for the new Standard environment and the mythological turn two kills.



Next week: I will look at a couple more of the post-**Fifth Dawn** decks including some that were sent in by readers. We will also try to step back from individual decklists and understand what the Standard format as a whole is going to look like on June 20th with one fewer card from **Darksteel** and all the new ones from **Fifth Dawn** bringing the picture into a new focus.

Brian David-Marshall has been involved in Magic since 1994 when he was violently shaken by someone searching for the game. He has organized tournaments, run a store, and is currently the Pro Tour Historian. His latest venture is Top8Magic.com, the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.



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