

Fifth Dawn: Impact of the New Mech Search

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Hello everyone and welcome once again to Limited Information. Thanks to everyone who took the time to write in with their thoughts on the *Fifth Dawn* related articles they'd like to see. The general consensus seemed to be that an overview article was definitely required along with some discussion relating to the impact *Fifth Dawn* would have on the individual colours as well. As a result I'm going to give you a general overview of the new mechanics today and I'll go into a bit more depth on each colour over the coming weeks.

I certainly won't be dragging out a long series of articles as I think it's important to get some initial thoughts out there early. *Fifth Dawn* will only be around in the Limited formats until *Champions of Kamigawa* takes over in October. Although four months sounds like a long time it'll soon pass and I think it's better to get some *Fifth Dawn* opinions out there now, even if they may turn out not to be 100% correct once we have more time to get used to the set. It's always difficult to predict exactly how a set like *Fifth Dawn* will affect things so soon after it's introduction but I definitely feel that there are some obvious things we can discuss even at this early stage.

Also, a quick apology for last week. I'm currently on vacation and we ran into email trouble trying to get the article to Scott in time for the holiday on his side. It looks like we've got that problem fixed now, plus a good work-around for next time if there is one. Thanks for your patience and understanding. On with the show!

Sunburst and Scry

The best place to start when looking at a new set is with the new mechanics it brings to the table.

Scry is the simplest one by far as it's basically just an additional ability that's been tacked on to a few useful cards. Almost any form of deck manipulation is as welcome in limited as it is in constructed. In some cases it is even more useful in limited as there is rarely anything you can do if you're short on mana or if you've drawn too much. Let's have a quick peak at the cards that have Scry built it. Click on any of the links to have a look at them:

Black – Fill with Fright
Black – Lose Hope
Green – Ferocious Charge
Green – Tel-Jilad Justice
Red – Magma Jet
Blue – Condescend
Blue – Serum Visions
White – Stand Firm

Pretty much all of those cards are playable; Fill with Fright is the only one I'd be disappointed to be playing with solely because it's a little too expensive for the effect it gives. It too would be decent if it cost less, but even so you'll still see it as the 22nd or 23rd card in some decks. Stand Firm is the weakest of the rest and that won't make the cut when you have better cards but I like one mana combat tricks so I can see myself playing it some of the time. Eyes of the Watcher isn't playable in Limited really as you'll rarely have enough cards that trigger it and even when you do you might not be in a position where you can pay the extra mana to get the Scry effect. The two green cards along

with Magma Jet stand well above the others but it's the simple Serum Visions that's worth a paragraph I think.

How often should a simple card like Serum Visions make the cut? Obviously you'd have to be playing a good amount of blue as the card certainly isn't powerful enough to warrant splashing. Assuming you are the blue mage though, Serum Visions is almost certainly better than the worst card in your deck. Everyone always says you should play exactly 40 cards in Limited, and never 41 or 42. Why? Simply because having as small a deck as possible increases your chances of drawing your best spells. Serum Visions helps out this way in two regards. Firstly, because it replaces itself immediately, it effectively reduces your deck to 39 cards albeit at the cost of one blue mana. It also allows you to change the top two cards of your library, either removing excess lands or digging a little deeper to find that land or spell that you need. If a simple cantrip with Scry attached is playable, then any other spell that actually does something useful must be playable as well.



The second major mechanic in *Fifth Dawn* will have a much, much bigger impact on the Limited formats. I am, of course, talking about Sunburst.

Sunburst is a mechanic that has the potential to change the way you draft throughout the Mirrodin and Darksteel packs. It's a mechanic that is found exclusively on artifacts and as a result it's a mechanic that affects all colours equally. You don't usually care about Affinity for Artifacts if you're the green or white drafter, but you will care about Sunburst cards. There are a lot of Sunburst cards amongst the common artifacts in Fifth Dawn and if none of them are useful to you then you'll be picking from a much smaller pool of cards than everyone else.

Once again here's a useful list of the Sunburst cards you can expect to see in your packs over the coming months:

Commons:

- Baton of Courage
- Heliophial
- Opaline Bracers
- Pentad Prism
- Sawtooth Thresher
- Skyreach Manta
- Suntouched Myr

Uncommons:

- Infused Arrows
- Arcbound Wanderer
- Etched Oracle
- Lunar Avenger
- Spinal Parasite

Rares:

- Clearwater Goblet
- Engineered Explosives
- Solarion Suncrusher

The commons are the main ones to consider here, as they are the ones you'll be seeing with much more regularity. In order to evaluate the Sunburst cards individually it's worth establishing some sort of level from which they can be measured.

3 Is The Magic Number



When playing with most Sunburst cards you really need to be playing with three different colours before you get your mana's worth. Several of the commons demonstrate this: Skyreach Manta is very weak as a 5 mana 2/2 flyer, but it's actually quite strong as a 3/3 flyer. The same applies to Suntouched Myr. Opaline Bracers is worse than Vulshok Morningstar if you can only get two counters on it but it becomes better than Vulshok Battlegear if you can get a third counter.

When drafting with *Mirrodin* and *Darksteel* it was always preferable to try and stick to two colours where possible. Sometimes you had powerful cards that warranted splashing but in general if you could play two colours, you did. *Fifth Dawn* changes all of that. If your deck is strictly two colours then there are a good number of *Fifth Dawn* cards that just aren't very good for you. Drafting within *Mirrodin* and *Darksteel* with a view to splashing a colour is positively

encouraged due to the addition of the Sunburst mechanic in *Fifth Dawn*.

As a result of this cards that provide multiple colours of mana or simply off-colour mana become far more desirable than they used to be. If you are Blue-Red than that Talisman of Dominance starts to look really good as not only will it provide the usual acceleration as well as helping out with a potential black splash, it also now gives you a way of improving any Sunburst cards you pick up in *Fifth Dawn*.

I'd actually go as far as to say that off-colour Myr may be preferable to on-colour ones from now on. If you have enough lands in your main colours then you often don't need the coloured mana a Myr provides. The acceleration is the important thing. An off colour Myr still gives the same acceleration but it too will also improve Sunburst cards.

Cards that have the potential to provide more than one colour of mana will also increase in value. Journey of Discovery and Darksteel Ingot become a lot better as they both give you the potential to provide you with a third and perhaps even fourth colour of mana.

Whilst three is definitely the number that should be used to evaluate the Sunburst cards, it's easy to see how ridiculous some of them are if you can up that number to four. Skyreach Manta is truly excellent when it's a five mana 4/4 flyer with no drawbacks. Compare it to Goblin Dirigible for example, which is uncommon, costs more, and has a big drawback too. Opaline Bracers becomes comparable to Empyrial Plate if you can get four counters on it.

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By using three as the 'average' for Sunburst you can also see quickly which cards don't make the cut. Sawtooth Thresher isn't particularly exciting as a six casting cost 4/4 with a fairly average ability. Spinal Parasite is pretty appalling as even when you can generate three different colours all you get is a 2/2 creature with a mediocre, situational ability.

The last Sunburst card that's worth looking at is one that is actually a Sunburst enabler. Pentad Prism will easily allow you to get four mana all of different colours on your third turn. If you can find three different lands then the Prism helps you get all five colours on turn three.

Take a look at last week's article by Brian David-Marshall to see how well Pentad Prism worked for him at the pre-release. If you can get all five colours on turn 3 then as well as having the possibility of dropping one of the five Bringers you can simply play a Skyreach Manta as a 5/5 or an Etched Oracle as a 4/4 with mana up to sacrifice it for cards. If these go unanswered they will win the game very quickly and will easily make up for the extra card (the Prism) it took to get them into play.

The last interesting thing to note about the Prism is that it does still stay in play after you've used up its charge counters. This means it will still make your Affinity spells cheaper, it will still pump up your Nim cards and it can be sacrificed for a useful effect, e.g. to an Atog or Krark-Clan Grunt.

I'm not normally a fan of one-off mana accelerators in limited - certainly I don't think Seething Song is playable for example. The Prism could be the card that changes that as it opens up some truly powerful possibilities.

There are plenty of commons in *Mirrodin* and *Darksteel* that provide coloured mana. Mana Myrs, Talismans, Darksteel Ingot, Vedalken Engineer, Journey of Discovery, Chromatic Sphere and so on will all need to be valued a little higher due to the presence of the potentially powerful Sunburst cards in *Darksteel*.

That's it for the *Fifth Dawn* mechanics. I'll start covering the rest of the set and how it will change Limited over the coming weeks.

Thanks for reading,

Scott.

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