

Scott Wills

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It's the start of a new week and that means it's time for some more Limited Information. This week I'll be carrying on from last week's article and discussing the draft pick presented there. For reference the situation we'll be going through is this:

It's a *Mirrodin-Darksteel-Fifth Dawn* draft and you've started off with a base green deck and moved into red after three nice *Darksteel* picks. You have the following playables going into *Fifth Dawn*:

Slith Predator  
 Tel-Jilad Chosen  
 Viridian Shaman  
 Viridian Joiner  
 Tel-Jilad Wolf  
 Krark-Clan Stoker  
 Neurok Spy  
 Skyhunter Patrol  
 Fangren Hunter  
 Tangle Spider  
 Tangle Golem

Turn to Dust  
 Leonin Bola  
 Pyrite Spellbomb  
 Echoing Ruin  
 Talisman of Dominance  
 Journey of Discovery  
 Barbed Lightning  
 Flamebreak

You open the following *Fifth Dawn* Pack:



**Enchant Artifact**

Enchanted artifact has "At the beginning of your upkeep, sacrifice this artifact unless you pay its mana cost."  
*Vudalven weapons sold to outsiders are as dependable as the vudalven themselves.*

—Ron Spears

**Instant**

Counter target spell unless its controller pays  $\infty$ .  
**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.)

—Ron Spears

**Artifact Creature**

Sunburst (This comes into play with a +1/+1 counter on it for each color of mana used to pay its cost.)  
 Flying  
*As the dawns break, the manta soars.*

—Christopher Hester

0/0

**Sorcery**

Add  $\color{red}$  to your mana pool for each tapped land your opponents control.  
*The Quickwater Sea hissed and bubbled at the indignity. The Vudalven shaman just smiled.*

—Martina Fibrona

**Horned Helm**

Equipped creature gets +1/+1 and has trample.  
 ♦♦: Attach Horned Helm to target creature you control.  
 Equip 1 (1: Attach to target creature you control. Equip only as a sorcery.)

—Martina Fibrona

**Instant**

Armed Response deals damage to target attacking creature equal to the number of Equipment you control.  
*Raksha watched as the goblins continued to pour onto the Razor Fields. "They just don't know when to stop, do they?"*

—Doug Chaffin

**Fleshgrafter**

Discard an artifact card from your hand: Fleshgrafter gets +2/+2 until end of turn.  
*Necrogen enflames certain emotional centers in the Morioks' brains: hate, aggression, and especially greed.*

—Jim Murray

2/2

**Sylvok Explorer**

♦: Add to your mana pool one mana of any color that a land an opponent controls could produce.  
*Any creature on a druid's shoulder is his family, any land under his feet his home.*

—Wesley England

1/1

**Wayfarer's Bauble**

2, ♦: Sacrifice Wayfarer's Bauble: Search your library for a basic land card and put that card into play tapped. Then shuffle your library.  
*It is the forest beyond the horizon, the mountain waiting to be climbed, the new land across the endless sea.*

—Raynell Echo

**Tyrranax**

1 ♦: Tyrranax gets -1/+1 until end of turn.  
*It outnumbers you one to many.*

—Carl Critchlow

5/4

**Baton of Courage**

You may play Baton of Courage any time you could play an instant.  
 Sunburst (This comes into play with a charge counter on it for each color of mana used to pay its cost.)  
 Remove a charge counter from Baton of Courage: Target creature gets +1/+1 until end of turn.

—Hughes Tabor

**Loxodon Anchorite**

♦♦: Prevent the next 2 damage that would be dealt to target creature or player this turn.  
*The loxodon ascribe religious superiority to those born albins, believing them to be spiritually pure.*

—Jan Peltzer

2/3

Which card do you draft?

## What are you looking for?

Before looking at the draft pick it's worth taking a few moments to examine the playable cards you have already to try and figure out what you'll be looking for from the *Fifth Dawn* pack.

Right now you have a reasonable amount of cards for a respectable red-green deck. A few early game cards in the Slith, the Chosen and the Talisman, and a decent late game with Fangren Hunter, Tangle Golem and Tangle Spider. Your removal is good with both Viridian Shaman and Echoing Ruin to deal with artifacts, and Barbed Lightning and Pyrite Spellbomb to take care of other creatures. Flamebreak is a nice sweeper although it has a very awkward casting cost in anything beyond a two colour deck.

There's a potential splash there with Neurok Spy and Skyhunter Patrol both being excellent. Right now though you only have a Talisman and the Journey to support that possibility. Normally you wouldn't consider splashing for something like the Patrol due to its coloured mana requirement but with *Fifth Dawn* white being so good you may want to make it a heavier component of your deck.

If you're considering splashing for either of those cards then you're going to accept that you'll weaken cards like Tangle Golem, Slith Predator and Flamebreak in the process. All of these have heavy colour requirements and won't work well in a three colour deck.

Finally, you do have a definite need for some more creatures as you're fairly light right now. As the *Fifth Dawn* packs come round you should be focusing on two things: First of all, you need to get more solid creatures to round out your deck. Second of all, you need to decide whether to go three or even four colour to support a splash and some Sunburst cards, or whether to stick with two colours to maximize the effectiveness of the cards you have already drafted.



*Splashing is definitely an option.*

With those comments in mind let's have a look at what you all voted for from this pack:

Which card do you draft?		
Grafted Wargear	3167	26.6%
Skyreach Manta	1453	12.2%
Wayfarer's Bauble	1448	12.2%
Ouphe Vandals	1169	9.8%
Horned Helm	845	7.1%
Plunge into Darkness	837	7.0%
Sylvok Explorer	825	6.9%
Tyrranax	693	5.8%
Loxodon Anchorite	514	4.3%
Condescend	410	3.4%
Fleshgrafter	155	1.3%

Disruption Aura	147	1.2%
Mana Geyser	118	1.0%
Baton of Courage	101	0.8%
Armed Response	35	0.3%
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>11917</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Thinning out the choices

There are plenty of cards here that aren't worthy of a first pick, or that simply aren't appropriate to this deck. However, since this is such a new set I'll give a few comments on them before moving on to the cards that should be considered.

Mana Geyser – Draft a five mana off-colour Sorcery that doesn't actually do anything? No sir.

Armed Response – You should never be playing this card, even if you have five or six pieces of equipment in your deck. It's just way too situational and draw-dependant; you can never rely on it to get the job done.

Fleshgrafter – This guy obviously isn't bad but this isn't a deck with a high number of artifacts and this card isn't in either of the colours you're currently thinking about splashing for. He's fine and everything – he's even one of the higher picks for black in this set – he just isn't good in this particular deck and he should be discounted early on for this pack as a result.

Disruption Aura – I wouldn't imagine there are a lot of readers out there who can still remember drafting when Pendrell Flux was in the format but I do and let me tell you it wasn't that great a card. It was good early on in the game when your opponent couldn't afford to pay the cost, but later on if there was a nasty threat you needed to deal with it just didn't do anything. Your opponent would just pay the mana and keep smashing you. Disruption Aura is basically the same except it might not even target many of the permanents your opponent has. And it costs more. So not a high pick is basically what I'm saying. By all means board it in if your opponent shows you some Myr Enforcers, Pewter Golems and Goblin War Wagons but otherwise pass on it.



Plunge into Darkness – This is a little tricky to evaluate. It's probably playable but it's certainly not a bomb. You can wait until you've got a creature about to die, then you can sacrifice it for life and use that life to dig into your deck for something great. Or you can use it as a painful Impulse. It becomes better if you have some ridiculous bomb in your deck you might want to dig for but it's not the best pick here by a long shot.

Horned Helm – This is a fine little card and being able to use its 'Instaquip' (yes I made that word up but it's boring writing "...its ability to equip at instant speed..." all the time!) ability freely in this deck is definitely beneficial. Unfortunately for Horned Helm we have a much more powerful piece of equipment in this pack – Grafted Wargear. Horned Helm has to get cut simply because the Wargear should always be taken ahead of it in this situation.

Those are the easy cards to remove. There are still nine cards left for possible consideration though. All of those have the potential to be played in the deck but there are a few more that need to be taken

out before you get down to the best choices from this pack.

## Good, but not good enough

Condescend – This is a very playable card in this format; I like the Scry ability more and more every time I use it. You can use this to gain some early tempo by taking out their first play or you can save it and take out a late game bomb. Whilst you will sometimes be unable to hold back the necessary mana to cast this it will usually trade for an opponent's card whilst setting up your draws in the process. It's a good card, but I'd be hesitant to call it a great card and there are some great cards in this pack. I'd cut the Condescend from the list of potentials simply because it's not quite up to the power level of some of the other picks.

Tyrranax – Common creatures don't come much tougher than this guy. With his ability to assign five damage and then pump his toughness up significantly after damage has been assigned he's very difficult to kill in combat. He's on colour, and would almost certainly make the cut in this deck, but he's not really what you're looking for from this pack. You've already got some beefy ground guys and you really want to avoid having a lot of creatures that cost more than four mana. At this point Sylvok Explorer is a better choice as it gives you something to do early in a game as well as providing mana acceleration for the big guys you've already got. In addition to that the Explorer will assist your Sunburst costs in most matches. All those facts combine to make the Explorer the better green pick. Hopefully you'll pick up a Tyrranax later in the draft but right now getting the early acceleration is more important.

Loxodon Anchorite – Cutting this guy is tough as he's one of the best commons in the set and there's still a possibility he would make the cut in your deck. However it is just that – a possibility. If you were passed no further white cards then you wouldn't want to be splashing for Patrol and Anchorite alone. Given that you didn't really receive an abundance of white goodies in the *Mirrodin* pack it's fair to assume you might not get too many in *Fifth Dawn* either.

Ouphe Vandals – It's a guy and it's artifact destruction, what's not to like about this card? Well several things unfortunately. It's certainly no Viridian Shaman. First of all this doesn't do anything to the majority of artifact creatures. Myr Enforcers and the like are not threatened by this kind of vandalism. It also doesn't do anything about artifacts like Thunderstaff and Sun Droplet that can still have an impact on the game without an ability being activated. Artifacts that have already had their activation costs paid don't get hurt either. If you're trying to find an answer to a Neurok Spy with Cranial Plating on it then Ouphe Vandals aren't going to do much unless your opponent is foolish enough to try and equip the Plating onto something else. Finally, it also doesn't do anything to artifact lands, Myrs or Talismans. Often it was nice to take out an opponent's mana source if they were a bit short but the Vandals can't target mana abilities. On top of all of this the Vandals force you to leave a green mana open every turn whilst your opponent simply sits there and doesn't bother activating their artifact. You might think I don't like the Vandals, but I actually do. They're a fine card but they are most certainly not reliable artifact destruction. They are simply a warm body with a useful ability and that doesn't rank high enough in this pack to consider first-picking them.

Wayfarer's Bauble – Judging from the reader poll this one may generate some discussion! The Bauble is an extremely difficult cut but I believe it is correct. This card is very close to Sylvok Explorer in what it achieves and I already know of several people who rate the Bauble over the Explorer,



especially in a deck that is potentially three colours. Compared directly to the Explorer it initially seems that the Bauble has a lot of points in its favour:

- It fetches a land into play and so it's acceleration that isn't vulnerable to removal.
- It fetches any basic land so it can find you a colour that you're missing.
- It doesn't require coloured mana.
- It interacts very nicely with cards like Trinket Mage and Leonin Squire.

Sylvok Explorer has all those points against it yet in this situation I still believe it's better than the Bauble. Tiny 1/1 creatures aren't typically very relevant but in this equipment-filled world even a humble 1/1 can have an impact on the battlefield. Sometimes you attack with it for an extra point or two of damage, sometimes it gets thrown in the way of a Plated Slagwurm to buy you a turn in the damage race, and sometimes it gets equipped up and trades off for something useful. In this deck there's already a Leonin Bola which gives the Explorer something to do later on, and there's a decent chance the Horned Helm in this pack will make it around the table and end up in your deck. More than ever this format encourages the use of 1/1s for mana over lands and in this deck I think the Explorer is a better choice than Wayfarer's Bauble.

Baton of Courage – This is one card that I think was massively under-rated in the reader's poll. It's becoming clear that this is an excellent combat trick that often allows you to kill an opposing creature in combat with one counter whilst still leaving two more counters to dominate combat again in the future. It's miles better than Mana Geyser and probably should've featured in the top five. The Baton actually has a better place in the deck than the other Sunburst card in the pack – Skyreach Manta – simply because this is still playable when you can only manage two counters on it. Having said that Skyreach Manta still just edges this in terms of power because it is more powerful than the Baton at three counters and also has the potential to be ridiculous if you hit four or five counters. With a Journey of Discovery in this deck and the potential to pick up a Dawn's Reflection later on generating four different colours might not be difficult for your final deck and as a result Skyreach Manta is the card I think you should go for if you're thinking of going towards a multi-colour Sunburst deck.



*Much better than many may realize...*

With those all eliminated we're left with just three cards that would all make good first picks for the deck. The choice comes down to Grafted Wargear, Skyreach Manta and Sylvok Explorer.

Let's get some other opinions before tackling the choice between those three.

## What the Pros say

**Kai Budde:** The pick comes down to Grafted Wargear and Skyreach Manta, the other cards aren't in the same league. The problem is that the otherwise very powerful equipment isn't all that good in this deck as Slith Predator is the only two casting cost guy that can be equipped so far. If you take the Wargear here, you need to draft Sylvok Explorer pretty high in the following pack but the deck really wants more two casting cost guys anyway so that doesn't change much. I'd still go with Grafted Wargear as the card is just a lot more powerful and even a turn three gray ogre and a turn four Wargear + Equip is a ridiculous tempo advantage.

**Ken Krouner:** This pack comes down to 3 cards for me. Grafted Wargear, the safe pick; Wayfarer's Bauble, the tough pick; and Skyreach Manta, the high risk/high reward pick.

Wargear goes well in every deck. It is just a really good card. The Bauble is really good, but it is a bit underpowered for a first pick. I'd take Manta. It seems obvious that your G/R deck will at least splash blue for the spy with more potential splashes. If Manta is a 3/3 flier for 5 it is very good in this format. If it gets any bigger it borders on unfair.

I think you have to take Manta here.

**Zvi Mowshowitz:** Baton of Courage is the best card in the pack and you need the effect desperately. This is an easy one.

**Jeroen Remie:** I'd pick the Skyreach Manta, as even as a 3/3 for 5 it is still a very good card in this format. You also have a decent amount of mana fixers, so the Explorer wouldn't be that exciting, and neither is the Wayfarer's Bauble. The Baton is a decent trick but isn't always that game breaking. It all matters on how much you want to play with your mana, but I feel that the Manta just is the only card in the pack to have sufficient power to warrant the first pick.

**Marco Blume:** The cards I'd consider are Skyreach Manta, Baton of Courage, Grafted Wargear, Loxodon Anchorite, Condescend, Sylvok Explorer and Wayfarer's Bauble and the Tyranax.

The Loxodon would be the 2nd white card with Skyhunter Patrol both feature double white casting cost. The mana base doesn't look like it wants to support that so the Anchorite is out. Baton of Courage is a nice trick but in terms of power it is left behind by the Grafted Wargear so it won't make the cut either. Condescend is a nice card overall but simply not as powerful as the other cards in this pack so it's out.

Wayfarer's Bauble is very good in the *Fifth Dawn* environment as it accelerates you and helps you out with your Sunburst cards but you hope to get it much later as a cheap pick so I wouldn't take it here. Sylvok Explorer is similar to the Bauble and shares its fate too, even though I prefer the Explorer to the Bauble almost any time.

The Tyranax is one of the better fatties that the green deck has but it's not more than just a fatty so I don't wouldn't take it this early and try to get one later to have two high casting cost creatures in the deck.

The Grafted Wargear is one of the most powerful equipments to be printed. The bonus it provides is massive and the cost makes it really powerful.

This deck so far has only two second turn creatures: Slith Predator and Tel-Jilad Chosen. The Predator is a perfect target for the Wargear but the Chosen can't be equipped at all. I don't think this deck really is good for drafting such an aggressive card as the Wargear as it has no one-drop and only one two-drop drop that is equippable. Skyreach Manta is one of the most powerful common cards in *Fifth Dawn* in my opinion. If you are able to play it as a 3/3 on turn five then it is really good. Everything above 3/3 is above the line for a common card. The deck so far is straight up GR but already has a Journey of Discovery and a Talisman of Dominance so there is already a realistic chance that you can provide the manabase for sunburst cards and hope for more Mantas and Suntouched Myrs.

I would take the Skyreach Manta.

So four picks for the Manta and all of them are fairly conclusive. Zvi is the lone dissenting voice with his choice of Baton of Courage but Zvi is known for an occasional slightly eccentric pick, particularly with the addition of *Fifth Dawn*. I can see where he's coming from; as I said in my comments Baton

kind of makes more sense in a deck that could still wind up as two colours. It's not a bad choice at all, but I think the Manta has more potential here.

Marco gives excellent explanations as to why he dismissed the other cards and it's interesting to note both he and Jeroen both rate the Baton as a respectable combat trick too. Hopefully those opinions will give you all a little more faith in the card. I doubt I'll be seeing it second from bottom in future polls at least!

I'm also happy that Marco backs up my own opinion that Sylvok Explorer is usually preferred to Wayfarer's Bauble as that is something I thought I would have a lot of trouble convincing people of. It won't always be true – if you have a Trinket Mage or Auriok Salvagers for example the Bauble's appeal goes up tremendously.

So with four votes for the Manta do I agree with them?

### The Final Three

I think it's clear from the Pro quotes that the Explorer is the weakest card of the three. The Wargear and Manta are both too powerful to pass up on and although the Explorer provides some much needed smoothing to the deck it shouldn't be picked this early. You definitely want an Explorer or two in this deck but you'll be sacrificing too much picking one from this booster.

I actually think the Grafted Wargear is the most powerful card in the pack and you clearly all agreed with that with over 3,000 of you voting for that as the pick. Marco Blume gives a very good explanation as to why he didn't go with it and all of his reasons are sound.



*Sometimes it does come down to raw power.*

The Wargear is simply ridiculous in a good aggressive deck with early drops. Yes, it has a significant drawback, but you may remember this group of cards called "Creature Enchantments" that were the pre-cursors to equipment. They had a similar drawback – you'd lose two cards if your opponent could remove the creature thereby killing the Enchantment too – but the most powerful of these were still very high picks. The power generated by something like Armadillo Cloak was worth the risk and the same is true for Grafted Wargear. The difference here is that your opponent has to have artifact removal; they can't take care of the Wargear by blocking the creature. Yes it's a risk but some decks don't even have artifact removal and the risk is well worth it in any case.

The Wargear does need a deck with cheap creatures in it though. You want to be equipping and attacking the turn you play this and that might not always be a possibility in this deck. Only Slith Predator can be targeted on turn three and whilst that's a nice combo it isn't enough. This deck is a little too slow for the Wargear and the final card in the pack is just a better overall fit.

So it's Skyreach Manta that is left. It's interesting that it was heavily favoured by the Pros and yet managed only half the number of reader votes as the Wargear. Assuming the deck will be mostly red-green there are only two cards that provide access to a third colour of mana. With the Neurok Spy and a Talisman to aid in its casting it is very likely that this deck will see a blue splash. Thought Courier and Trinket Mage are other commons that would be very good to splash and you may well pick these up later on. Assuming that was the case you'd be running two or three Islands and possibly another mana fixer like a Bauble or Dawn's Reflection. All of these combined give you plenty of ways of getting a third counter on the Manta, and perhaps even a fourth.

The final deck should be able to cast the Manta as a 3/3 fairly consistently and that makes it very powerful indeed. It fits in with the deck much better as you need another potentially powerful attacker and the evasion the Manta has is definitely something this deck could do with.

Skyreach Manta gets my vote as the best pick from this pack.

Thanks for reading,

Scott Wills.

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