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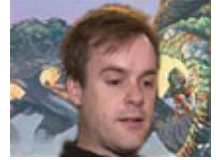
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Fifth Dawn Comes to MTGO



Chad Ellis · Online and Enjoying It
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Drafting MD5

When you play most of your **Magic** online, the release of new expansions feels like when a great new movie comes out and for whatever reason your friends have all seen it before you. *Fifth Dawn* is live in Standard but on MTGO we're still waiting for our prerelease. Fortunately, as with that great movie, we're now the ones with something new to play with and it's time for our friends to envy us the fun of diving into a new set.

Yesterday we were finally able to buy our first *Fifth Dawn* packs, and this Thursday the tournaments begin. You can read the detailed announcements [here](#). The quick version is that release League and Draft starts on Thursday, with Premier Sealed/Draft on Friday. Those who win their Premier events win entry into a Championship tournament on Saturday, July 24th with 6x prizes and no entry fee.

In honor of *Fifth Dawn's* arrival on MTGO, I'm going to give you my best advice on drafting MD5 (*Mirrodin/Darksteel/Fifth Dawn*). Sealed deck is harder to give substantive advice on since it's so dependent on the cards you happen to open, and while there will be all-*Fifth Dawn* drafts those tend to be so degenerate it's hard to know where to begin. Besides, MD5 will be the most important draft format for some months to come, as well as determining which people making top eight in their Premier events get to play in the Championship tournament.

At the moment there are only three archetypes I like drafting in MD5:

- Affinity with Discipline
- Blue-White
- Blue-Black

You'll notice that each of these archetypes is base blue. This partly reflects blue having the best *Fifth Dawn* common in **Trinket Mage** and the best common Sunburst enabler in **Vedalken Engineer** but is also a lot about synergy, as we'll see below.

Drafting Affinity in MD5

By Affinity with Discipline, I just mean the standard affinity archetype – the discipline refers to the fact that *Darksteel* and *Fifth Dawn* each have fewer “pure” affinity commons and fewer artifacts you want in your affinity deck. Where *Mirrodin* has four common artifacts that also say “Affinity for artifacts” on them, two common Blue spells with Affinity and common artifact lands of every color, *Darksteel* tempts you with the Engineer and removal spells and has only a colorless artifact land. *Fifth Dawn*, meanwhile, has even fewer affinity toys.

The net result is that the Affinity archetype is weakened, but it is far from dead. In fact, the general impression that it is so much worse with *Fifth Dawn* may mean that the lower demand for affinity cards fully offsets the damage.

The secret to drafting Affinity successfully is having the discipline to not be tempted by non-affinity spells wherever the choice is remotely close. Draft artifact lands high, take **Myr Enforcer** over any common (and over all but a handful uncommons and rares), take **Frogmite** high, and don't hesitate to snag Tooth and Scale. **Pyrite Spellbomb** and **Aether Spellbomb** are fantastic

and should be taken over any common removal spell. (This is especially true given the potential for abuse with **Auriok Salvagers** or **Trinket Mage**, but even without those cards the need to draft artifacts would push them above **Electrostatic Bolt** which was a higher pick in MMM and MMD.) **Nim Shrieker** and **Irradiate** are still playable, but are no longer the high picks they were in MMM or MMD, when you could count on getting enough affinity enablers for your deck. And in *Darksteel*, despite its wonderful benefits for Sunburst, I still rank **Spire Golem** above **Vedalken Engineer** for this archetype. In fact, the only common I really enjoy taking that isn't an artifact is **Quicksilver Behemoth**, both because it is absolutely unfair in power terms and because it single-handedly solves the problem of creatures with protection from artifacts.

Before looking at the other archetypes, a quick word on artifact lands. In MMM the best artifact land was without doubt **Seat of the Synod** since Blue was almost always your base color. **Great Furnace** and **Vault of Whispers** were tied for second, since those were the most likely support colors. Other artifact lands were occasionally useful (e.g. enabling **Elf Replica** to destroy **Arrest**) but they were often pretty close to colorless lands that “only” supported Affinity.

The secret to Affinity is having the discipline to not be tempted.

Darksteel changed this calculus significantly. The addition of Golems with affinity for basic land types meant that **Seat of the Synod** was usually worse than an artifact land in a support or even splash color. Of course, you wouldn't know whether you got any **Spire Golems** until it was too late, but the prospect of having a cheap artifact flyer was important enough to try to keep your Blue mana sources reserved for basic Islands. (This wasn't the only way for Affinity to use Golems aggressively – if your deck had enough artifacts you could make any color your “base” and take advantage of its golems, but the Blue golem was the best one for Affinity in any case.)

Now *Fifth Dawn* pushes us even further towards off-color artifact lands. In MMD I would happily snag a couple **Tree of Tales**, knowing that at worst they would enable my Affinity spells or save my **Neurok Prodigy**, and at best I would get passed **Oxidize** or **Deconstruct** and have an easy splash. In MD5 an off-color land powers up any Sunburst spell I happen to draft. The combination of *Darksteel* and *Fifth Dawn* has thus pushed **Seat of the Synod** from being clearly the best *Mirrodin* artifact land to clearly the worst.

Blue-White Control

Blue-White is a refreshing archetype for me, since it looks like MD5 supports a more traditional draft approach combining card advantage, solid defensive creatures and evasion. **Loxodon Anchorite** is a dream common for U/W draft, with a respectable body and an ability that has been dominating limited combat since it was first printed. **Skyhunter Prowler** is a solid defensive card that can turn into a major threat with any equipment, and **Leonin Squire** can serve either as card advantage or a bear (or both!), depending on your needs and what you draw. **Stand Firm** isn't great as an offensive combat trick but seems very solid for helping hold the ground, since on defense you're able to choose who blocks who. (**Vanquish**, by contrast, is only good on offense and will probably be overrated by players who don't realize that U/W is a control deck and can usually dominate combat once it has stabilized.) And while it isn't technically White, **Healer's Headdress** offers incredible board control to a base-White deck, letting you prevent multiple points of damage as well as giving a key creature a boost to toughness.

And then, of course, there's **Auriok Salvagers**. A 2/4 for 3 is playable in U/W anyway and if you throw in a minor ability you've got a good card. Throw in a good ability, like gaining +1/+1 and flying once you've got threshold, and you've got a first pick. Throw in a really good ability like the power to recycle spellbombs or retrieve **Viridian Longbow** or **Leonin Bola** and you've got a bomb.

An uncommon bomb in the base set is something to be aware of but is rarely a major factor in considering what to draft. But uncommons in third sets are much more likely to show up during a draft (due to smaller set size), and the potential to draft this particular creature that combines solid defensive stats with the ability to win the long game single-handedly is a nice reward that will come up often enough to matter.

In Blue, **Trinket Mage** is your number one common pick, period. (This is true for the other archetypes as well.) **Trinket Mage** is so important that it strongly influences your picks in *Darksteel*, to wit: do not pass **Leonin Bola** unless you are taking a **Skullclamp** instead.

Zvi Moshovitz drafted Bola over **Fireball** at Nationals and the pick got a bit of attention. In my opinion, Zvi's pick was clearly correct. Not only is Bola a lot closer to **Fireball** in overall power than many people realize (especially when you may be able to tutor for the Bola but can't tutor for **Fireball**), once you've passed a Bola to your right you've given the person feeding you in *Fifth Dawn* a very strong reason to take **Trinket Mages** themselves. This is A Bad Thing™.

After **Trinket Mage** the power level drops quite a bit, but that reflects the power of the Mage not the weakness of Blue's remaining commons. **Thought Courier**, **Condescend**, **Serum Visions** and **Advanced Hoverguard** are all perfectly solid cards.

And did I mention **Vedalken Mastermind**? (2) is often tougher to cast than (3), and he can't return your opponent's creatures, but this little guy looks an awful lot like **Crystal Shard**, allowing you to dominate combat and protect your creatures from removal. He's a lot easier to kill than the Salvagers and isn't quite at their power level but that's a second powerful uncommon you have access to, and the demanding mana requirement may mean you see him late.

Blue-Black

Blue-Black is also a more "normal" archetype than we're used to playing recently. Black removal and Blue bounce control the board while evasion creatures mount an offense. Black Blue is sometimes a control deck but is more often a tempo deck, and it is for this reason that **Lose Hope** is my pet card for the set. If you're drawing (which I strongly recommend if you draft enough removal to play this as a control deck) and cause your opponent's turn-two Myr or Engineer to **Lose Hope** the impact can be devastating. Later on it's almost equivalent to **Stand Firm**, allowing you to win unfavorable combat situations, and of course can kill Nims and other nasties.

Having said that, **Fleshgrafter** must be your best common pick. "Awkward to block" Gray Ogres have been good in tempo-based draft decks ever since Flank Knights were printed, but **Fleshgrafter** takes "awkward to block" to the next level. At the cost of a card he can beat up almost anything in sight, and once you've forced some damage through your opponent has to pay close attention to your hand size and the possibility you might just pump him up to 8/8 (or more) for the win.

The obvious question, especially for those who know me, is why don't I draft Five Color Green? After all, I'm the guy who thinks that **Kirtar's Wrath** is an obvious splash card, and who has drafted 5CG in all-*Mirrodin* draft. Shouldn't Sunburst have me salivating at the prospect of a return to the days of *Invasion* Block?

Sadly, no. While Sunburst cards are both cool and powerful, and while Green has some solid off-color enablers, I don't consider Five Color Green viable at all.

Here's why.

First of all, Green itself isn't strong enough. Green is the weakest overall color in MD5, with Fifth Dawn doing it few favors. While Blue has **Trinket Mage** and a strong supporting cast, Green has an artifact kill and another pump spell. The only other decent Green commons are a mana elf and a six-drop fattie. Five Color Green almost always requires a strong Green base and I don't think you can count on it here.

Second, and most important, the spells simply don't favor a 5cG strategy the way they did in *Invasion* Block. Consider the Sunburst spells. While they are strongest if you have access to five colors, they are generally good with three and they are always castable. (In one draft I cast **Suntouched Myr** as a 1/1 because I was color-screwed and needed an Affinity enabler. Later in the draft I should have cast him as a 1/1 in order to keep my Black mana available.) This means that "normal" drafters are more likely to be taking them rather than handing them to you late.

Contrast this with *Invasion* Block, where the spells that rewarded a 5cG strategy actually had fixed mana requirements. Sure, the R/G mage would take **Tribal Flames**, but as a 5cG drafter





you would often get insanely powerful picks late because the people passing to you simply couldn't cast them. My personal favorite example of this is getting shipped **Rith the Awakener** third pick in the second set of packs at Pro Tour Barcelona, but even if you aren't getting dragons you're likely to get **Battlemages**, **Allied Strategies**, **Consume Strength**, or even (provided I'm not passing to you) **Jilt**.

Finally, there's the problem that you have to wait until the third pack before seeing your 5cG spells. That's a big risk to take and the potential reward doesn't seem worth it. I would love to be proved wrong on this, but for now I think you need to avoid 5cG and see **Sunburst** as a reason to take off-color lands in your affinity deck or to be more open to splashing a third color rather than as a base strategy of its own.

Bug Progress

So much for my insights on drafting...now let's have another chat with Alan Comer. After all, when an offline player says a card breaks the game he's talking about it being too powerful. With MTGO, some cards have quite literally broken the game, i.e. causing it to crash or otherwise malfunction. I asked Alan if he'd be willing to do an interview in which he'd share the cards he and the rest of the team are the most worried about blowing up when *Fifth Dawn* is released. His reply was daringly confident but quite encouraging if you trust him as much as I do. He said such an interview would be boring because **All Suns' Dawn** is the only card they're worried about. Instead, Alan wanted to point out the major bugs that have plagued MTGO up to now but should be fixed with this release. Some of them were relatively minor problems in terms of game play, while some caused cards not to work and others caused the game to crash. You'll have to judge for yourself whether the fixes are real, but my money's on Alan.

- **Leonin Bola** (and other unattach equipment effects) should be reliable now.
- **Auriok Bladewarden** with negative power no longer crashes the game.
- **Fungusaur** now only gets one counter when blocked by multiple creatures.
- **Loxodon Warhammer** and **Armadillo Cloak** now only create one trigger when the equipped creature damages multiple things at once.
- Sacrificing equipped creatures for mana no longer crashes the game.
- Many creatures/spells that had sacrifice effects now check for ownership of the card to be sacrificed.
- **Jinxed Choker** is now stopped by CoP: Artifacts.
- **Mourner's Shield** now creates a one-use shield, not an until end of turn shield.
- **Mourner's Shield** now understands split cards that are imprinted on it.
- **Quicksilver Elemental** now filters out duplicate abilities. Prior to this fix, you could potentially crash the game by having it gain its own abilities.
- **Mind's Desire** now reduces the casting cost of **Darksteel Colossus** to zero.
- The cap on how many cards you could draw simultaneously while having out multiple card drawing replacement effects is higher.
- Added the multicolor token frame so that **Soul Foundry** won't cause a crash if it generates a multicolored token creature.
- **Bomb Squad** knows its source again, for CoPs.
- **Krosan Verge** no longer shuffles the deck twice.
- Concession during coin flips no longer crashes the game.
- **Shield of Kaldra** now makes everybody's Kaldra equipment indestructible.
- Countering **Blinding Beam** with **Gilded Light** no longer crashes the server.
- You can no longer remove flood counters from **Mirrodon's Core** to generate mana.
- Chastise on a creature with negative power no longer crashes the game.
- Exchanges of permanents now fail if the same player controls both.

That's quite a list of bugs, ranging from the obscure (the **Krosan Verge** double-shuffle probably only matters if someone boards **Psychogenic Probe** in against you) to the common (**Leonin Bola**). They're there for you to test, and we'll let Alan know if any of them are still "live".

Thanks to everyone for the overwhelming response to last week's contest. I'm still going through the nominations and am still taking new ones. A few people sent in nominations without explanation – just a name. If you're one of them, please resend your nomination with an

explanation as to why you think your nominee should be chosen as one of the finalists for the reader vote.

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