

Scott Wills

Monday, September 06, 2004

Hello again everyone, it's been a while, I know. I don't want to bore you all with the gory details but suffice to say the last month or so hasn't been the most fun for me. A slipped disk in my neck and a trapped nerve in my shoulder meant that even sitting at a desk hasn't been too easy lately. Things are however on the mend, and hopefully I'll be back on board for the foreseeable future. A big thank-you to the writers who filled in during my absence and thanks also to Scott Johns for keeping the job open during that time too!

Although there are lots of exciting *Champions of Kamigawa* previews going on it's still going to be a few weeks before we get to play with those cards and so today I'm going to re-visit the newest Limited mechanic we're currently still playing with: Sunburst.

I've drafted a lot of Sunburst decks in the weeks since my initial article about this mechanic and, as to be expected, my opinions on the various Sunburst cards and the different Sunburst enablers have changed a fair bit in that time.

Why should you draft Sunburst at all? Well, when it works you get a lot of excellent draft picks that other players at your table aren't able to take advantage of. You get some incredible under-costed creatures and you're often able to support them with a lower land count than you would need in other decks due to the mana fixers you have. A lot of the time your mana fixers serve double duty, whether it's thinning your deck or providing small bodies to help out in other aspects of the game. A good Sunburst deck can do some truly unfair things and if your opponent doesn't have the right answer to the questions you pose they'll be in a lot of trouble very quickly.

Sunburst Enablers

Sunburst Enablers are the support cards that allow you to make the most of the spells in your deck that have the Sunburst mechanic. Whilst you can simply rely on playing lots of different lands, that's usually a bit risky and there are plenty of other ways to ensure you're able to make the most of your Sunburst cards.

The most obvious place to start for me is with the mana-Myrs; Iron Myr, Copper Myr, etc. These are amongst the most valuable fixers you can get as they'll be useful whether you end up playing Sunburst or not. Right now I expect to draft mana-Myrs somewhere between 2nd and 5th pick in a draft. If I can pick them up later than that I'm very happy; they really are that valuable. Off-colour Myrs are typically preferable to on-colour ones should you ever have to make a choice between the two.

Talismans are basically the same as Myrs. I still generally prefer the Myr as the attached 1/1 can often prove valuable. A 1/1 doesn't sound like much but it can get in a point or two of damage, chump-block in the late game or give you another body that your Equipment might need.

Journey of Discovery is obviously excellent except for the fact that it's green. The green cards aren't the best in this block but hopefully you won't have to play too many of them in your Sunburst deck. Providing two different colours, a third or fourth turn Journey will often set you up wonderfully for big Skyreach Mantas and Sawtooth Threshers over the next few turns. Journey is one of the cards that will allow you to get all five colours into play and thus maximise your Sunburst cards and I'd expect it to go around 3rd-6th pick in draft.

Chromatic Sphere is an obvious gimme in any Sunburst deck but the most overlooked Sunburst enabler for me are the artifact lands. How are these fixers exactly? One simple card – Trinket Mage. Sunburst decks often work well when they are base blue due in no small part to the presence of Vedalken Engineer in *Darksteel*. If you don't get that Leonin Bola or Skullclamp for your Trinket Mage to fetch then Artifact lands make an excellent alternative. Just think of Trinket Mage as a Sylvan Scrying with a 2/2 attached. In a Sunburst deck that's an excellent thing to have.



Darksteel offers up Vedalken Engineer but also Darksteel Ingot and Mirrodin's Core as excellent additions to your Sunburst deck. All of these should be drafted very highly; I certainly wouldn't be disappointed having to first-pick an Engineer if my deck needed it.

Viridian Acolyte and Reap and Sow are other cards you might want to pick up if your deck is base green. These aren't cards that you want to be playing really but you can usually get them 10th pick and beyond and it's definitely worth snagging them in case you do finish up without enough mana-fixers. I'm more likely to play Acolyte than Reap personally, especially if there are a number of splashed spells in the deck (If I were base green with Echoing Ruin, Betrayal of Flesh and Leonin Abunas all being splashed then the Acolyte could help cast all of those spells whereas a single Reap and Sow could not).

Moving into *Fifth Dawn* it's Sylvok Explorer and Pentad Prism that are the best picks. Both of these provide additional colours and mana-acceleration at the same time. I'd pick Explorer over Prism most of the time, but if I already had a Manta or Bringer of the Dawn then I think Prism becomes the better choice to power those out early. You need to balance these picks with drafting the actual Sunburst cards themselves of course, but you'll know going into *Fifth Dawn* just what shape your mana-base is in and where your priorities should lie. If you're unable to get these two then Dawn's Reflection makes for an expensive but acceptable substitute.

Like Chromatic Sphere before it, Wayfarer's Bauble is an automatic inclusion in this deck. These should be drafted fairly highly, as they'll help you bring your Sunburst spells online a turn earlier and with an extra counter.

I tend to value Thought Courier and Serum Visions a lot higher in my blue Sunburst decks. Sunburst is a mechanic that requires balance – you need to draw your mana fixers and your Sunburst cards as well. Too much of either leads to a mana flood or an inability to make the most of your spells. Serum Visions and Thought Courier help smooth out your draw phases and it's this archetype more than any other that benefits from that effect.

There are other cards I haven't mentioned that I don't really place any value on. Paradise Mantle and Gemstone Array are two examples that are a little bit too slow, or too restrictive for my tastes. The Mantle has a place if your deck is part Affinity perhaps but I've never played Gemstone Array and I don't ever want to.

The Sunburst Cards

The actual Sunburst cards themselves do vary a lot in power but I do believe I under-rated some of them initially.

Infused Arrows is the best of the bunch I think, as it's excellent with three counters and just amazing if you can get the full four. Even if your opponent has an artifact removal spell in hand they won't be able to do anything about you killing off their best guy in response. The Arrows can easily take out

two solid creatures and for the very low price of only four mana this is the card I want to open when I'm drafting Sunburst.

Skyreach Manta is still the best of the Sunburst creatures but Etched Oracle is also very potent when you can get the four counters on it. Both of these creatures are excellent first picks if you are the Sunburst player but the beauty of this mechanic is that both of these cards might even be unplayable for others. Picking up a Manta or Oracle as late as fifth pick or even beyond that isn't unheard of.

It's the bigger Sunburst creatures that have gone up in my estimations over the last few months. Both Sawtooth Thresher and Lunar Avenger have been very solid for me as mid-to-late game fatties. Both of these can be very large and they're both very difficult to block safely. At its best Lunar Avenger is a 6/6 Haste that can become a 5/5 first-striker should your opponent ever want to tangle with it in combat. The ability to fly over for the last few points of damage is also very useful.

I'm also liking Suntouched Myr a lot more than I thought I would. It usually isn't tricky to get this guy out as a 3/3 on your third turn and you don't have to worry about finding that fourth or fifth colour to maximise his abilities. 3/3s are pretty large in this block and this is definitely a card I like to have amongst my three-drops.

Engineered Explosives is obviously excellent. You can always hold back specific cards and wait for the best time to wreck your opponent with it. It'll usually trade 2-for-1 at least and with it's casting cost of X considered as 0 when it isn't in play you can fetch this with your Trinket Mage and get it back with your Leonin Squire too.

If people are drafting to win and not just to pick rares you'll often find the five Bringers making their way around the table as it's only usually the dedicated Sunburst decks that can cast them. You won't see them every draft obviously but with eight *Fifth Dawn* rares opened each draft and five Bringers in the set they're not as unlikely to appear as you might think.

Sunburst Decks

Here are a couple of examples of two different Sunburst decks that I've drafted online recently.

The first is base green:

Sunburst		
Main Deck		
40 cards		
9 Forest	1 Bringer of the Blue Dawn	1 Creeping Mold
1 Island	1 Emissary of Hope	1 Essence Drain
1 Mountain	1 Etched Oracle	1 Journey of Discovery
	1 Fangren Hunter	1 Pentad Prism



3 Plains	1 Leaden Myr	1 Purge
2 Swamp	1 Molder Slug	1 Relic Barrier
16 lands	1 Sawtooth Thresher	1 Roar of the Kha
	1 Skyreach Manta	1 Serum Tank
	1 Suntouched Myr	1 Stand Together
	1 Sylvok Explorer	1 Wayfarer's Bauble
	1 Tangle Golem	
	1 Tel-Jilad Chosen	10 other spells
	1 Viridian Acolyte	
	1 Viridian Lorebearers	
	14 creatures	

The above draft started out with the Molder Slug first pick and the Hunter second. I picked up the Leaden Myr third, and then Creeping Mold came fourth. A fifth pick *Journey of Discovery* was a very nice surprise and the Chosen and Roar of the Kha rounded out the *Mirrodin* playables. I'd cut green pretty heavily but it's not the best in *Darksteel* so I didn't get much in return. The Emissary of Hope was taken first with a view to building the deck as green-white primarily but after that it was just a matter of picking some removal and whatever else came around. I really wanted an Ingot here and would've taken it over more-or-less anything but no luck.

Going into *Fifth Dawn* the mana was looking ok but not great. Leaden Myr, Journey, and a couple of Viridian Acolytes were all that I had so I knew I had to focus on getting some more mana-fixers over other, more powerful cards.



I opened the Manta and got passed the Oracle. Wayfarer's Bauble was actually a second pick over a lot of playable cards, and I was lucky to be gifted with a fifth pick Bringer after taking the Explorer fourth. At that point I would've taken every Prism that passed me but I was only able to get one seventh pick. The Sawtooth Thresher and Suntouched Myr both came late but were both very welcomed in this deck.

Looking at the deck you can see it's fine to run only 16 lands here. It's possible I should've run 15 in fact but there were a lot of green mana requirements so I wanted the ninth Forest to make up for that. Even with plenty of expensive cards the mana fixers here mean you can run less lands than normal and still be fine.

The deck played out well. I never drew the Slug but I did get a fourth turn Bringer off of the Explorer and the Journey of Discovery. This deck 3-0'ed the draft although it did lose a couple of games in the process; one to a mana flood and the other to Sword of Fire and Ice.

Here's an example of a base blue Sunburst deck that I recently drafted:

Sunburst



Main Deck

40 cards

3 Forest	1 Copper Myr	1 Baton of Courage
1 Great Furnace	1 Domineer	1 Conjuror's Bauble
10 Island	1 Juggernaut	1 Echoing Truth
1 Vault of Whispers	1 Leaden Myr	1 Echoing Truth
15 lands	1 Myr Retriever	1 Essence Drain
	1 Neurok Prodigy	1 Ferocious Charge
	1 Quicksilver Behemoth	1 Icy Manipulator
	1 Skyreach Manta	1 Infused Arrows
	1 Sombre Hoverguard	1 Leonin Bola
	1 Spire Golem	1 Pentad Prism
	1 Suntouched Myr	1 Serum Visions
	2 Trinket Mage	11 other spells
	1 Vedalken Engineer	
	14 creatures	

This is a good example of a deck that is part Affinity and part Sunburst.

This draft started with the Icy Manipulator and quickly got more into Blue with the Hoverguard and the Domineer. A Juggernaut and some Myrs were picked early but the pickings were fairly slim after that. The two artifact lands were taken above various playable and semi-playable cards in other colours.

I first-picked the Bola with the intention of grabbing all the Trinket Mages I could get in *Fifth Dawn*. After cutting Blue/Affinity heavily in *Mirrodin* the blue cards came my way in *Darksteel* with the Engineer, Spire Golem and the Behemoth all making their way to me in the first few packs.

After opening Infused Arrows the Trinket Mages were picked second and fourth I believe with the Manta sandwiched between them. Baton of Courage, Suntouched Myr and Pentad Prism are excellent in this deck but they're all cards that often go quite a way around the table.

The cut to 15 lands here was a fairly easy one as there are a ton of mana sources in this deck really. The two Myrs, the Engineer, the Prism and both the Trinket Mages can all help smooth out any land-light draws. The mana in this deck is excellent despite the fact that there are only 15 lands in the deck.

This deck was an easy 3-0.

I'll bring back the draft poll next week as all the Pro players are away at Worlds whilst I type this, so getting their feedback isn't possible right now. See you then!



© 1995-2009 Wizards of the Coast LLC, a subsidiary of Hasbro, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Statement](#)

