

The coolest tournament around Prerelease Primer

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Friday, January 24, 2003

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For the past three weeks, this site has featured a series of previews for the upcoming *Legions* expansion. Rather than discussing when the product goes on sale in retail outlets the authors invariably referred to the upcoming prerelease tournaments being held worldwide this coming weekend. Clearly we all assumed that each and every one of you has this weekend blocked out in your day planner for a weekend of prerelease fun.



Prerelease Tournaments January 25-26, 2003

Over the past three weeks it has become apparent to me that this is not true. In fact, I have received a significant number of emails from readers who are completely unfamiliar with how prereleases work (and more than a couple unfamiliar with the sealed deck format itself). I will try to remedy that situation. First, I am going to encourage you to go to a prerelease this weekend. Second, I am going to give you all of

the information you will need to have a great **Magic** weekend.

What is a Prerelease?

Legions will not go on sale in stores until February 3. But before that happens, players all over the world will have a chance to play with the new cards this weekend in Sealed Deck tournaments. To find the tournament near you just click [here](#).

I know that there is a significant portion of the **Magic** playing community out there who is wary of the tournament experience. Of all the organized tournaments you can play in, the prerelease tournaments are the most fun. All of the players start out with the same amount of experience playing with the new cards—ZERO. The focus of the tournament is not as goal-oriented as other tournaments. The moment when everyone opens the new booster packs for the first time is reason enough to attend. You are reminded of all of the things you like about **Magic**. Players ogle their new cards and crane their necks to see what the player next to them opened. Tables of players brainstorm new Constructed decks based on the new cards.

And this is all before you even play!

So, you've decided to go to a prerelease. Now what? Let me walk you through what you can expect at a typical event.

A Day in the Life

When you arrive at the location you will pay a tournament entry fee. This fee covers your entry into the tournament and with that you will receive an *Onslaught* tournament pack, three *Legions* booster packs, and a commemorative foil prerelease card (you cannot use this card to build your deck). Don't worry if you don't receive your tournament pack and boosters right away. Tournament organizers will generally wait until everyone is seated and hand out the cards to everyone at the same time.



What your entry fee gets you: an Onslaught tournament pack, three Legions boosters, and a promo card.

When you pay your entry fee you will be asked for your name and your DCI number. The DCI is the governing body for organized **Magic** and to play in a DCI-sanctioned event you must have a unique PIN that they assign to you. Do not worry if you don't have one. They are free to obtain and all you will have to do is fill out a card with your pertinent information. If you already have a DCI number but you don't remember it, don't worry. The organizer should be able to find it for you from the DCI database. Your DCI number is used to track your performance in **Magic** tournaments and lets you know how you are doing compared against every player in the world, in your country, or in your state. For more info about the DCI and specific tournament floor rules you should visit the [DCI homepage](#).

You have paid your entry fee and are registered for the tournament. Your foil prerelease card is tucked in your binder awaiting the day's best trade offer, you are seated and the cards are being handed out. At this point you will more than likely be asked to register the contents of the card pool you receive. There is a two-sided checklist that will be handed to you (this is a good time to mention that you should make sure to bring a pen!) and on one side you will find an *Onslaught* checklist and on the other a *Legions* one. After you sort by color and alphabetize your cards you will check off those card on this sheet. You will probably be asked to turn in the cards you have registered and the checklist. The cards will then be randomly redistributed and deck building will begin. The reason for this step is preserve the integrity of the event. Not only does it make it impossible for an unscrupulous player to bring in game-breaking cards that he didn't have originally but it allows you to play in the tournament with confidence that everything is on the up-and-up.

Time to build your deck. Once you have been given the cards you will be playing with you will have an announced amount of time to construct a 40-card minimum deck. The tournament organizer will provide you with additional basic lands to build your deck if you need them. Some organizers will

collect all of the basic lands and then redistribute them based on what each player needs to build his or her deck.

Building and Playing

A couple of quick pointers about Sealed Deck construction:

- Try, try, try to stick to a 40-card minimum. You don't need to play with all of your cards and some are better left unplayed. The closer you can keep the deck to the minimum size the more likely you will be to draw the best and most exciting cards in your deck.
- Play at least 17 lands in that 40-card deck. If you play more cards you will need to play more land.
- Try to play two colors if you can. It is perfectly reasonable to "splash" a third color as long as the mana requirements are not too intense. Splashing black for a [Cruel Revival](#) is fine. Splashing white for an [Akroma, Angel of Wrath](#) is not.
- All of the cards you do not use in your deck are considered your "sideboard." You don't have to worry about playing with an answer for every question in your main deck. You will be playing best two out of three and will have the opportunity to sideboard (meaning swap in different cards) for the last two games.
- Make sure you play with some removal (read: black or red cards!). There are a number of creatures like [Sparksmith](#), [Wellwisher](#), and [Keeper of the Nine Gales](#) that will dominate the game if you cannot kill them.

Now that you have built your deck it is time to start playing. Prerelease tournaments are run using a modified "Swiss" system. This means that there are a set number of rounds announced for the tournament and you can play in every round regardless of your record until the tournament is over. Most tournaments will have a posted prize schedule before the tournament starts. It may say that everyone with a specific record or better will win prizes at the end of the tournament. Usually, two losses will knock you out of range of prizes but you should find out before the tournament starts. Once you possess this information you will be able to make a decision about whether or not you want to continue playing based on the likelihood of winning prizes. Prizes are always *Legions* booster packs, ranging from an entire box for an undefeated record to 1/3 or a 1/2 box for less-than-perfect records. Or, you can just play the entire tournament for fun and practice, win or lose!

Each round lasts 50 minutes with a varying amount of down time between rounds. There are usually a variety of card dealers at these events looking to buy and sell cards. Some events even have signings by **Magic** artists. For example, I know that Matt Cavotta will be appearing in Boston. Trading is rarely



What a typical prerelease sealed deck will look like: 17 lands, lots of creatures, and a few good spells.

better than on prerelease day. You should have no trouble keeping yourself occupied while waiting for the next round to start.

Most prerelease events will have multiple "flights" running throughout the day. This means that instead of running one ginormous tournament there are many smaller ones held throughout the weekend. Under these circumstances you can sign up for more than one event. It will cost you another entry fee but is usually less expensive for the second flight you play in.

I hope this encourages you to dip your toe into tournament **Magic**, if you haven't already. If you are in NYC for the prerelease at Neutral Ground on Sunday make sure to look for me and let me know what you think. If you are somewhere else, I can be reached at the address below.

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