

The most fun you'll have with new cards

Scourge Prerelease Primer

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Earlier in the year, I wrote an [article](#) extolling the virtues of playing in the *Legions* Prerelease—not dissimilar from the one that appeared a few weeks back prior to North American Regionals. Well, as *Scourge* previews draw to a conclusion, we find ourselves only a few days away from being able to actually play with the cards. Although the *Scourge* set does not go on sale until May 26, players fortunate enough to live within driving distance of a Prerelease will have the opportunity to play Sealed Deck with the new *Scourge* cards and win additional *Scourge* packs almost a week and a half before most stores will have the product on their shelves. Click [here](#) to find a Prerelease near you. A couple of days after the *Legions* Prerelease I received an email from a Canadian player who had an amazing Prerelease experience:

I read your "Prerelease Primer" article on [MagicTheGathering.com](#). I have been a casual player for some time but have never played in any nonvirtual tournaments until today. I decided to finally give it a go today at the *Legions* Prerelease in Vancouver, B.C., figuring that since I have had a lot of success in *Onslaught* Sealed and Limited in *Magic Online* (1860 rating in Limited), that I might do alright. Your article really made it sound easy and fun to play in the event, and it soooo totally was.

Highlights of my day:

3. Beating Jackson Cunningham in round 1 (brother of *the* Jeff Cunningham, the number-one DCI-Composite ranked player in the world, according to [brainburst.com](#))

2. Beating Max Cunningham in round 3 (also brother of *the* Jeff Cunningham).

1. Beating Jeff Cunningham! (*the* Jeff Cunningham!) in round 5, putting me at 4 - 1 and giving me a shot at the top 8. I guess I'm lucky the Cunninghams didn't all meet me in the back alley after the tourney. :)

Thanks Brian for writing that article and getting me to get off my lazy butt and have some fun. I will definitely be a regular at Prereleases and other tournaments in the future.

—John in Vancouver

John's letter really made my day, and I knew that I would use it to try to inspire some of you potential tournament goers out there to give the *Scourge* Prerelease a try. Prereleases remain a singular tournament experience unlike any other tournament you will encounter. I think it has something to do with the laid-back atmosphere. Most players in attendance are there to get their mitts on the new cards before anyone else, and many don't attend any other tournaments all year.

There is a great deal of excitement when the cards are given out and players open their boosters for the first time. There is much oohing and ahing and showing off of cards. Despite an abundance of previews on both Sideboard.com and this site, the majority of the set remains (theoretically) unknown. We can tell from seeing the card in its preview that Dragonstorm can't possibly account for all of the instances of storm in *Scourge* as per the [Orb of Insight](#).

The Prerelease Experience

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

What your entry fee gets you: an Onslaught tournament pack, three Scourge boosters, and a promo card. Not pictured: Good times.

a typical event. (Yes, the following is recycled from my last article!)

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 and three *Scourge* booster packs. In most countries (including the United States) you will also receive a commemorative foil Prerelease card (you cannot use this card to build your deck), although some Asian countries use the premium cards as prizes. Don't worry if you don't receive your tournament pack and boosters right away. Tournament organizers will generally wait until everyone is seated to hand out the cards to everyone at the same time.

You may have noticed that no *Legions* cards are used in this tournament—only an *Onslaught* tournament pack and three *Scourge* boosters. This is a tournament to celebrate the *Scourge* set—you can add the *Legions* set to the mix soon enough. There may be side tournaments that use *Legions* cards if you are really interested.

A number of players from around the world wrote in complaining that their local tournament organizers gave away only two *Legions* boosters at the last Prerelease. Check your local DCI tournament page before you go. In North America and many parts of the world, the second and third Prereleases of the year feature three packs but (for reasons unknown to me) it is not true the world over and a handful of locations use only two additional boosters.

When you pay your entry fee you will be asked for your name and your DCI number. The DCI players' association is the governing body for organized **Magic**. 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 and all you 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 a DCI database. Your DCI number is used to track your performance in **Magic** tournaments and let you know how you are doing compared against every player in your state . . . in your country . . . in the world. For more info about the DCI and specific tournament floor rules you should visit the DCI homepage.

Registering and Building Your Deck

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, and 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 you bring a pen!) and on one side you will find an *Onslaught* checklist and on the other a *Scourge* checklist. After you sort by color and alphabetize your cards, you will check off those cards 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 deckbuilding 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 or she 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 the basic lands and then redistribute them based on what each player needs to build his or

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

her deck.

A couple of quick pointers about Sealed Deck construction:

- Try, try, try to stick to the 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 one of each land type for Karona, False God is not.
- You don't have to worry about playing with an answer for every question in your main deck. All the cards you do not use in your deck are considered your sideboard. You will be playing best two out of three and will have the opportunity to sideboard 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 and Wellwisher that will dominate the game if you cannot kill them. It is perfectly reasonable to play a third color for access to some removal.

Let's Play!

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 will almost always be *Scourge* booster packs, and may range from an entire box (thirty-six boosters) for an undefeated record to perhaps a third of a box for less than perfect records. Your tournament organizer will give you the specific prize breakdown before the event begins.

Each round lasts 50 minutes with a varying amount of downtime between rounds. There are usually a slew 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 Ron Spears will be appearing in person at the Richmond, Virginia, *Scourge* Prerelease. (Ron has illustrated numerous cards, including Akroma, Angel of Wrath; Phage the Untouchable; Naturalize; Astral Slide; Entomb; Rootwater Thief; and many more!) In addition, trading is rarely 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 gigantic tournament there are many smaller ones held throughout the weekend. What this further means is that you can sign up for more than one event. It will cost you another entry fee, but it is usually less expensive for the second flight you play in. Because the tournaments are run in smaller flights, you can either play for a little while or play all day long, signing up for tournament after tournament.

The tournaments are sanctioned (meaning the results are recorded by the DCI), but because they have low K-values they will not have a tremendous impact on your rating, which allows the tournament to remain a low-on-cutthroat-play, high-on-fun event. A Prerelease is also an excellent opportunity to try new styles of play like Booster Draft, if you are so inclined.

I hope you will give the *Scourge* Prerelease weekend a try. I will be hanging around the New Jersey Prerelease on Saturday. Stop in and say hello if you're in the area.

For the official information regarding locations, dates, and times of all the Prereleases around the world, please click [here](#).

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