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# Scourge Initial Impressions

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Learning Curve  
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So how did it go? I'm asking about the Scourge prerelease, of course. Although I am a huge fan of these tournaments and encourage you all to attend them, I am unable to actually compete in the event due to my advance knowledge of the set. Frown.



I still go, though. Not only do I get to hang out with my friends but I get to catch up with old faces that only seem to show up for prerelease tournaments. I play a little bit on the side in non-sanctioned, friendly drafts but not until later in the day when the action is winding down and players have won some packs. I don't mind the wait though. I get to observe how the new set works and see all the new cards in action. Plus I want to see how my predictions from the previews panned out.

## Top Plays

One of the plays from this weekend's highlight reel came at the hands of MagicTheGathering.com's own [Toby Wachter](#). Toby was playing with a blue and red sealed deck that had two copies of [Rush of Knowledge](#), [Torrent of Fire](#), [Erratic Explosion](#) and two [Scornful Egotists](#). I watched him play a handful of games and he was always drawing tons of cards on his way to an undefeated record. His deck came together splendidly in one specific game. After drawing five cards thanks to the converted mana cost of his [Mischievous Quanan](#), Toby followed it up two turns later with eight cards via his [Scornful Egotist](#). With his opponent hovering around sixteen life, Toby flipped his Quanan face down during his opponent's end of turn and unmorphed it on his next turn in response to his own [Torrent of Fire](#)—for 8—and forked it at his stunned opponent for a whopping 16 points of burn.



It was *Scourge* at its finest! I'm still not sold on [Rush of Knowledge](#) as a Constructed card—although when [Deep Analysis](#) and [Concentrate](#) rotate out of Standard it may see some play—but it is far better than I ever imagined in Limited. I rarely saw any player over the weekend draw fewer than four cards with it and it was usually more than that as in Toby's example above.

The other card I previewed with an eye toward Limited was [Zombie Cutthroat](#). Also better than I imagined—and I expected him to be pretty darned good! Players were indeed splashing him in non-black decks and I saw a couple of interesting games that revolved around him. My friend Pat had just played a morph while his opponent had a [Sparksmith](#) in play. [Sparksmith](#) was joined by another Goblin on turn three and the morph found itself under fire. Pat paid five life and flipped up an unexpected [Zombie Cutthroat](#), which survived with only a minor flesh wound. After one swing from the Zombie both players found themselves at 15. The [Zombie Cutthroat](#) and Pat's subsequent green and red creatures proved too big for his opponent to handle and did too much early damage for the [Sparksmith](#) to be very effective.

Another interesting play occurred when an overeager player sacrificed all his creatures to pump up his [Nantuko Husk](#) and cycled [Dirge of Dread](#)—to give it fear—for the apparent victory. His opponent was beaming as he paid five life to reveal his [Zombie Cutthroat](#)—in his otherwise blue and white deck—and blocked the feared creature. Obviously the attacking player is guilty of premature sacrifice but it was still fun to watch.

## Storm on the Horizon

I only previewed one mechanic that had potential Constructed applications in [Dragonstorm](#). I have no sightings or anecdotes of [Dragonstorm](#) being played over the weekend (although I did use a [Dragonspeaker Shaman](#) to play an amplified [Kilnmouth Dragon](#) on turn five and a [Dragon Mage](#) on the next) but storm was all the rage. [Wing Shards](#) was an unexpected surprise and judging by the way people were actually trading for the uncommon I

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expect that it will see play in Constructed. It is certainly an excellent foil for **Goblin Warchief**. If your opponent plays a **Goblin Warchief** and attacks with it and another Goblin you can nail 'em both with Shards. Even if players end up maneuvering around **①\*\*\*** by holding back attackers it will at least negate the haste edge that the Warchief brings to the table.

**Sprouting Vines** is another card that might see play in Constructed. Thanks to its instant speed it is unlikely that you will ever get fewer than two lands with this spell. Although I don't know if any decks will want to run what are essentially **Krosan Tuskers** when they can already run four copies of the uncounterable, cycling beast.

The storm card that everyone was excited about was another uncommon, **Brain Freeze**. There was much speculation about how to break this card and more than one player at the event proclaimed it the best "milling" card ever. I'm not ready to open that particular **can of worms** again so I will reserve judgment until a later date. Besides, the storm card that I am obsessed with is **Mind's Desire**. I think it might be the most powerful card in the set. Obviously it can't just plop into any deck but there are several that spring to mind. It goes right into the much-maligned Tight Sight deck in Standard and the Extended format offers an array of options from Enchantress decks to **Tinker** decks even an Extended version of Tight Sight. I can't even begin to imagine how good this card will be in Type 1, although I rarely get to play that format and it may be that there are just so many broken cards available that this one will have to wait in line.



The reason that **Mind's Desire** seems so exciting to me is that it breaks the rules of storm. Since storm spells only "put" copies on the stack as opposed to those copies counting as spells "played" you don't get to go crazy if you cast multiple storm spells in the same turn. This is not true for **Mind's Desire**. Well, it is true... but not really. Say you play **Mind's Desire** as your sixth spell in a turn—don't laugh; it's not far fetched at all—and you get to remove six cards from the game that you can play for free. Assuming for the moment that they are all spells and that one of them is another **Mind's Desire**, you can have a pretty ridiculous turn. You play the first five spells that you removed and then play the second **Mind's Desire**—all for ZERO mana, mind you—and now you have TWELVE spells that have been played this turn. The copies of the original **Mind's Desire** don't count but the six spells it allowed you to play for free sure do! And what if one of the twelve cards you remove with your second **Mind's Desire** is another **Mind's Desire** or a **Tendrils of Anguish** or a **Brain Freeze**? Are you getting the picture?

It has to be used in dedicated explosive decks so it might not have universal appeal and judging from the trading activity at the prerelease there is not much advance buzz about this card. But I, for one, am clearly expecting big things.

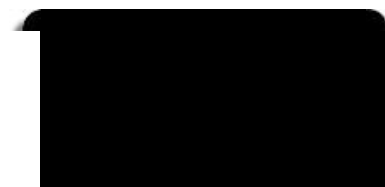
The cards that were in demand were traded for heavily, and using an utterly unscientific method I bring you:

## The Top 5 Traded-For Scourge Cards at the Prerelease



### #5 Sliver Overlord

When I owned a card store, **Sliver Queen** was always among the top dollar earners among singles we carried. Judging by the binder action I saw this weekend I imagine the new management will have similar success with this gold card.



### #4 Decree of Annihilation

Uncounterable instant cantrip **Armageddon** anyone? One player in the tournament opened two of these and was besieged with escalating offers all day long.



### #3 Eternal Dragon



My friend Pat cycled this guy to get his seventh land, then played [Bladewing the Risen](#) after he untapped... and apologized as Bladewing invited [Eternal Dragon](#) and [Bladewing's Thrall](#) to the party. Cool plays like this just fanned the flames for this card-drawing engine.

### #2 Form of the Dragon



Just one look at the volume of [message board posts](#) attached to the [preview](#) for this card and you knew this was going to be a popular card with serious and casual players alike. But it was surprisingly not the top dog...

### #1 Forgotten Ancient

Despite most players being on the fence about its playability in Constructed, everyone seemed to want this guy more than any other card. I guess when you make the card you want commemorate the experience with a souvenir. Hey, why wasn't this the prerelease card?



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This is by no means to be construed as a best of the set list. Trading at a prerelease is a unique situation since many of the players tend to be of the more casual variety and it is one of the few times of the year that they get cards. They want one-stop shopping and are looking to leave with the cards they need. The tournament breed of players tend to wait until the market cools down a little before trading for the power rares. What will those rares be?

Stabilizer, Mind's Desire, Decree of Annihilation, Form of the Dragon, Eternal Dragon, Decree of Justice, and Stifle were all high on the watch list for players I spoke with. As Mind's Desire's and Decree of Annihilation's stock rose over the weekend, so did Stifle's. That's because storm is a triggered ability as is the "destroy all lands" effect of a cycled Decree.

Next week we'll soldier on around the Learning Curve with another look at some of the cards from *Scourge*.

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Brian David-Marshall has been involved in **Magic** since 1994 when he was violently shaken by someone searching for the game. He has organized tournaments, run a store, and is currently the Pro Tour Historian. His latest venture is [Top8Magic.com](http://Top8Magic.com), the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.



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