

## How to see the new cards in action! ***Darksteel* Prerelease Primer**

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It's that time of the year again! *Darksteel* reviews are drawing to a close and the real thing is almost here. I am here to remind you to attend your local *Darksteel* prerelease event this coming weekend. I know that a great many of you already have the date circled on your calendar and some space cleared in the front of your trade binder for the big day. I also know that there is still a large percentage of the **Magicthegathering.com** readership that has never attended a **Magictournament**, much less a Prerelease.

I am here to tell you that it is not so scary if you know what to expect. Conveniently, I am also here to tell you what to expect. First I'd like to take a moment for the players that have attended tournaments and Prereleases in the past but might be on the fence about this weekend's events. There are two very good reasons to attend.

The first is that this will be the first time you are exposed to the last set to be released before the various Regional and Provincial tournaments that are the initial steps on the Road to Worlds. It is your first chance to see the cards in action and trade for key components you will need for your regional Provincial decks. I rarely leave a Prerelease without the first hand experience of new card interactions inspiring new deck designs. I had four Upheavals before I left the *Onslaught* prerelease at a trade value that was far less than it would come to be months later when everyone needed them for their Psychatog decks.



The second reason is that the Team Limited season is rapidly approaching. It remains one of the easiest opportunities for aspiring Pro Tour players to get on the Pro Tour. The rating plateau that the DCI sets for invites to the Team Pro Tour is relatively low and there will be sanctioned team events at every tournament incorporating *Darksteel*. These events will be sanctioned tournaments and could represent a serious head start for any team hoping to qualify for the team Pro Tour on the basis of their rating.

But to a certain extent that's probably more for those who have already attended tournaments. As for those of you who have never dipped their toes into tournament waters...

This is the perfect tournament to just dive right in! The level of rules enforcement is lower than you might be concerned with at the potentially more intimidating PTQs, Regionals, and big money tournaments. That is not to say they are lax to the point of encouraging people to cheat but rather the rules are enforced in such a way as to teach and inform less experienced players how the game works. It is a perfect environment for a new player to demystify the tournament experience and play the game in a competitive arena.



Once you decide to attend the tournament there are a few things I recommend doing before you actually go. The first is to call your local organizer and extract as much information from them as possible. Check and see if there is a discount for preregistering. Find out if there will be any artists or special guests attending the event. You may want to pore over your card collection for cards illustrated by that person and bring them to get signed. Not all organizers can manage this feat but you should still check—it is a pretty common occurrence on the East Coast of the United States where I live.

You might want to find out what food and beverages will be available on site and nearby. If you have any special dietary concerns (diabetic, Atkins-ing, picky eater, etc.) you might want to bring your own food and drink to the event. In some locations the tournaments will be held on two separate days. While the weekend will be made up of a series of self contained tournaments some players can't get enough Prerelease action and look to play in as many events as they can all weekend. If you are looking to play on both days you should ask if the organizer has made any deals with a local hotel for a reduced room rate.

When you leave for the event you should make sure that you have the basic tools you will need for a tournament. The most basic tools you need are the money for your entry fee and some pen and paper to keep track of your life totals. Who knows, you might even want to refer to your notes and write a tournament report for your local store's website or to post in this site's forums. If you do decide to write about your experience it is nice to be able to look back and retrieve the names of all your opponents and some of the game details.

You should also bring some cards for trading purposes. I recommend bringing one binder of trade stock. While these events are fun they can also be hectic and confusing. Trying to keep track of

multiple binders and long boxes of cards can be overwhelming. I also recommend trying to find out the names of any official dealers who might be setting up at the show from your local organizer. Many dealers post buy lists on their websites of cards they are looking to pay cash for and it could be a good opportunity for you to purge some cards from last month's deck in order to pay for some new cards for the new one you design while playing in the prerelease.

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 a *Mirrodin* Tournament Pack, three *Darksteel* 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. Again, check with your local organizer. I have seen a couple of organizers are offering an additional pack for participation to each player (if so, like the foil card it is not to be included in your deck).

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 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 a DCI database. The 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, even in your state or city. For more information about the DCI and specific tournament floor rules you should visit [the DCI homepage](#).

So, 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 checklist that will be handed to you and you will see a complete checklist of all the *Mirrodin* cards on one side and a *Darksteel* checklist on the other, all sorted alphabetically by color. After you sort and alphabetize your cards you will check off those cards on this sheet.

You may be asked to turn in the cards you have registered and the checklist. The card pools 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.

This can be a tough concept for new players to get their heads around. They often worry that the cards they register will be better or more valuable than the ones they get back. The best way I have found to explain it is simply that the initial cards you are handed are not yours. Let me repeat that: The cards you are registering are not yours. They belong to someone else and you are registering the cards for them while someone else is doing the same with the cards you will eventually end up with.

Time to build your deck. 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. 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.

A couple of quick pointers about sealed deck construction:

- 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 than 40 cards you will need to play more land. *Mirrodin* has actually seen the number of lands you can play go down thanks to the Talismans and mana producing Myr. The general rule of thumb is that for every two mana cards like this you include, you can cut one land away from the base number of seventeen. (But don't *gotoo* crazy with this...)
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- 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 green for an *Oxidize* is fine. Splashing two Islands for Vedalken Archmage is much less reasonable. Splashing for the triple black in *Death Cloud* is a bad idea.
- 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 for the last two games.
- Make sure you play with some removal. In the past that has meant playing red and/or black to dispatch creatures. With the artifact block Green has become one of the removal colors as well thanks to Deconstruct, Turn to Dust and now *Oxidize* offering potent answers to your opponent's artifact threats.



Some casting costs are better for splashing than others...

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. Prizes are always *Darksteel* booster packs, ranging from an entire box for an undefeated record to 1/3 or a 1/2 box for less perfect records.

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

In addition to the main event there are going to be additional smaller tournaments—or 'flights'—throughout the weekend. You can play in as many tournaments as you want to over the weekend one after the other and you can amass a pretty tall stack of *Darksteel* cards before it is all over. I mentioned the Team Sealed event earlier and you may also be able to try out other new formats such as Booster Draft or Rochester Draft with the new cards. Again, ask your organizer what kind of side events you can expect and what they will cost.

I hope you will at least look at the [Darksteel tournament page](#) to see if there is an event convenient to where you are living. I have forgone the opportunity to view the complete *Darksteel* spoiler list in order to be eligible to compete in my own local event at Neutral Ground in New York. That should give you an idea of how much fun these tournaments can be! I had the opportunity to look at the entire spoiler months before the sets release and instead I chose to only see the cards that were previewed—the same information you have.

I can't wait to see the new indestructible cards, the new types of affinity, and equipment that unattaches for powerful effects first hand. I also can't wait to be surprised by all of the cards I have no idea about for the first time in over a year. It's one of the most enjoyable times to be a **Magic**player, so hopefully if you're one of those who haven't had a chance to experience this you'll consider coming out this weekend!

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