

Play with the new cards first! Fifth Dawn Prerelease Primer

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Fifth Dawn is rising this weekend but only for a select group of players at [special events being held all around the world](#). Don't worry. There is plenty of room to accommodate everyone and I am here to give you all the details you need to count yourself among those players.



Judging by much of the chatter in the forums there is a great deal of excitement regarding the release of Fifth Dawn with its powerful new cards and mechanics. *Before* the cards actually go on sale in stores there will be Sealed Deck tournaments held that include Fifth Dawn all over the world. They are known as Prerelease tournaments and they are going to be held this weekend. Prerelease tournaments are the absolute first chance you have to get your hands on the new set before it goes on sale in stores.

Every time a new set is released I beat the brush to get the word out about the Prerelease events and this time around is no different--although Fifth Dawn itself is quite different than the sets that have preceded it in this block. I am certain that there is still a large and lurking percentage of [themagicthegathering.com](#) readership that has never attended a Magic tournament. I hope I can encourage you to dip your toes into the competitive environment with these ideal starter tournaments.

Prereleases are the perfect tournament for the new player. Since the rules are enforced at lower level to accommodate more novice players there is little chance of being victimized by your own inexperience. Don't take this to mean that the rules are so lax that you will be cheated at every turn. Rather, they are enforced in a way designed to improve your understanding of the game while making sure it is played in accordance with the rules. The rules enforcement is intended to be more informative than punitive.

Once you decide to attend the tournament there a few things I recommend doing before you actually go. The first is to check the website of your local tournament organizer and extract as much information from them as possible--you can find that from the Fifth Dawn tournament page. Check and see if there is a discount for pre-registering. 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.

If you want to go further than that you can actually contact the organizer to find out what food and beverages will be available on site and nearby. If you have any special dietary concerns (diabetic, Atkins-ing, food allergies, 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 and failing that if there are any hotels that they can recommend nearby.

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. If you keep track of your opponents and some pertinent game details you might even be able to construct a tournament report for your local website or the forums here at magicthegathering.com.

The Prerelease is a bounty for players looking to trade Magic cards but 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 suggest finding 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 *Fifth Dawn* 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 *Fifth Dawn* 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 unused. 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. Fifth Dawn introduces a bunch of crazy five color themes and mechanics - Sunburst and at least one of the Bringers having been previewed over the last two weeks. There was a trend toward playing fewer lands in *Mirrodin* Darksteel limited. In *Mirrodin* Fifth Dawn you might want to play a little more if you are going to try and accommodate the five color themes. You need to play enough mana to support your main color and still draw the other colors and fuel any mana fixers you might have to find the colors you don't draw. If you are playing cards like Journey of Discovery and Sylvan Scrying you will certainly need to include enough Forests to ensure that you can cast them and then your other colors will follow.

Normally I try and encourage players to stick to two or three colors in Sealed Deck whenever possible. That may not be possible if you open something like a Bringer but you should not try to bend your mana just for Sunburst. Remember that you can sometimes just stumble into the extra colors with off-color Myr, Talismans, and Chromatic Sphere. You don't need to play off-color lands just for Sunburst. Bringer of the Black Dawn on the other hand...



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. One of the most common deck building mistakes I see involves main deck enchantment removal in *Mirrodin* block. There are only a small handful of enchantments that you are really concerned with and including *Tempest of Light* in your main deck is almost always going to give you a dead card. Artifact removal on the other hand is rarely a mistake.

Once 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 *Fifth Dawn* booster packs.

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 *Fifth Dawn* cards before it is all over. Many organizers will also be running team sealed tournaments which are a great way to play with two friends as three-person teams. 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 [Fifth Dawn tournament page](#) to see if there is an event convenient to where you are living. I have forgone the opportunity to view the complete *Fifth Dawn* 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 cards and mechanics in action--I actually know little more than you do about the full spoiler. I want to experience seeing new cards for the first time. I am looking forward to Sunburst, Scrying, the wacky casting costs of the Bringers, and hopefully more than a few surprises. 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!