

Why to go to this weekend's Prerelease events, what to expect, and a card you'll surely be seeing again and again.

Choose Your Own Ravnica Adventure

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My original plan for this primer was to create a "Choose Your Own Adventure" format to walk you through the process of attending this weekend's [Ravnica Prerelease events](#). As I started to lay it out it became apparent to me that it was not going to be as easy I as I originally had hoped. The problem stems from having such a wide variety of ways to experience the event. Players have the choice of attending an event Saturday or Sunday in many areas, can play at Midnight Friday in others, can play Sealed Deck, Booster Draft, 3-person Team Sealed Deck, or even Two-Headed Giant. As I attempted to map out the article it quickly sprawled so far out of control that the diagram bore a striking resemblance to the NYC Subway system map.

Suddenly it dawned on me that the Prerelease itself was a Choose Your Own Adventure experience and there was no need for me to navigate the IRT line to the Bronx. I realized that my energy would be better expended on laying out your options and persuading you to attend. Not that you should need much convincing... I mean, if [this preview](#) is any indication of the power level of the set (and from what I've seen, it most certainly is!) I would be surprised if people weren't lined up down the block when tournament organizers show up for business Saturday morning.

A cool new set that harkens back to *Invasion* is one pretty good reason to attend this weekend's tournament but there are a whole slew of reasons why you should drag your lazy caboose out of bed on Saturday morning and head on down to your nearest Prerelease.

In addition to the scads of cards you receive and the additional packs you might even win (we will get to that shortly) everyone who signs up to play will receive a special foil card specifically tailored to commemorate the event. Always a rare, the card features alternate artwork and has the weekend's date stamped on it. The only way you can get one of these cards is by signing up for a prerelease tournament. The promotional card that was given away to attendees of the *Betrayers of Kamigawa* prerelease has become quite sought after. If your opponent has ever unleashed an unusual looking Ink-Eyes onto the field of battle they most likely received it at the Prerelease – or traded for it at some exorbitant cost later on. In case you missed [the Arcana](#) that had jaws dropping all over the world at 12:01 Tuesday morning Eastern US Time, here is the prerelease card in all its death-loving glory.



Meeting people, making trades, speculating about how to break the new cards in Constructed formats, and debating what order to draft the commons is a big part of what makes Prerelease tournaments such a special time. The atmosphere is decidedly different from more serious events such as Pro Tour Qualifiers and Grand Prix. That is not to say that the people attending the Prerelease are unconcerned with winning – or that you don't want to win for that matter – but I don't know of any tournament but a Prerelease where players can have as much fun in defeat as in victory.

Unlike tournaments with known sets your opponents have no idea what tricks to watch out for. The mana you leave untapped on your turn could indicate anything – seriously, with the advent of hybrid cards how can you even track what someone's open mana might represent? While at a higher level tournament your opponent might scowl or grumble at your timely trick, at a prerelease they are far more likely to laugh, read the card you just played a few times, and offer to trade you for it after the tournament.

And why shouldn't your opponent be in a good mood? At this weekend's festivities players will have the chance to win packs even if they don't win a game. Every hour tournament organizers will be giving away three packs of *Ravnica* as a door prize. To be entered into the drawing all you have to do is be entered into a sanctioned Prerelease event. Which brings us to the "Choose Your Own Adventure" portion of the article. And unlike the illustrated children's books from my past there are no

wrong choices here that will find you on the wrong side of an airlock, taking nervous steps down a pirate's gangplank, or breaking your time machine and becoming stranded in the land before time.

Midnight Madness

If you can't just wait until morning several tournament organizers – in North America anyway, not sure about the rest of the world – provide an early bird special. I think the trend began several years ago when one of the organizers realized that the agreement he had with Wizards of the Coast to run Prerelease tournaments dictated that he could not use any tournament product before the agreed upon date. It said nothing about waiting until 9am. As soon as the calendar went from Friday to Saturday at 12:01 am, the organizer reasoned, he was able to start running tournaments by the terms of his agreement. Midnight Madness was born. Over the years, more and more organizers have adopted the practice and with any luck you might find that your local organizer has jumped on board.



Big flight

For those of you who prefer not to play **Magic** until after they have had their Wheaties and read the morning paper Sealed Deck flights usually start around 9 or 10am. These tournaments generally come in two flavors. The Big Flight method is also called a Main Event and is a single tournament that will accommodate as many players as sign up. The tournament is usually played to a single winner who receives at least an entire box of booster packs. The prizes will also pay out in smaller increments of packs down to as far as the Top 16 players. The number of rounds in this tournament will vary based on attendance and will generally take longer than flights with smaller fixed numbers of players. The Main Event-style tournaments will generally be populated with more tournament experienced players. If you are new to the tournament scene or short on time you may want to steer clear of this one in favor of the smaller flights.

Regular flights

Every organizer offers 32-person tournaments that fire off as soon as they fill up. These tournaments will usually run four or five rounds and at the very least offer prizes to every player with one loss or fewer. Prizes vary from organizer to organizer and you should check your local tournament organization's website for more details. (I do know that at Professional Event Services they are giving away an entire box of boosters to the winners of every 32-person flight with prizes going down to 8th place.) 32-person flights are best for players newer to tournament Magic or players without an entire day to commit to an event. Since the tournaments begin as soon as they fill up there is little time spent waiting around. Since the tournaments feature a fixed number of rounds you know almost exactly how much time you are committing.

Team Formats



Katsuhiko Mori, Masahiko Morita and Masashi Oiso at Pro Tour Atlanta

One of the enduring appeals of **Magic** is the opportunity to share the experience with your friends –

friends that you made playing **Magic** in many cases. Prerelease events offer two different ways for you to play with your chums. For the past few years now, three-person teams have been a featured format every prerelease weekend. If you have ever followed the team Pro Tour then you have an idea how these work. You sign up to play with two teammates and build three decks and sideboards from two Tournament packs and four booster packs of *Ravnica*. When the team signs up you designate yourselves as A, B, & C and play against players with similar designations on other teams. You are looking for your team to win two of the three matches each round. What makes this format so appealing is that you don't need to win every round – that's what your friends are there for.

Team Sealed is an old favorite of mine but the exciting development for this round of Prereleases is the addition of sanctioned Two-Headed Giant. Two-Headed Giant is a [newly sanctioned format](#) that has been gathering a real head of steam since it debuted at GenCon – you can read the exact details at the [DCI Document Center](#). Two-Headed is especially well-suited to Prerelease events. The format is structured so that both players take their turn at the same time with table talk being well within the rules. In order for the players to be able to reach any kind of decision one of the players is designated as the dominant head and has final say on all decisions.

So what does this mean for you?

Do you have a friend you have been trying to teach **Magic** to? This might be the perfect opportunity for the two of you to play together. Not only do you get to walk through all the game decisions but you have final say on every play. You get to play with your friend, teach them some of the finer points of tournament play, and get to push them around all in one fell swoop.

Unlike other team formats where you need to rely on your teammate's **Magic** prowess, in Two-Headed Giant all you really need is a warm body. Have you ever wanted to show your significant other what the big **Magic** fuss is about? Why you want to spend Saturdays playing **Magic** instead of at the mall? Two-Headed Giant is a perfect way for you to share your love of **Magic** with the love of your life.

The Nuts and Bolts

So what is going to happen when you get to the tournament site for whichever format you decide you want to play in? The first thing that is going to happen is some minor paperwork. You will likely be asked to fill out a registration form with your name and DCI# before you fork your entry fee over to the cashier. If you have no idea what a DCI number is you may be asked to fill out an additional form and a DCI number will be assigned to you. Its painless and actually pretty frickin' cool. The DCI number is a PIN that is used to track your performance in DCI sanctioned tournaments – such as all prerelease events – and when you play in enough sanctioned events [free stuff will be sent to you](#) in the mail like textless spells, DCI Foils, and token creatures. Once you hand in the registration form with all your pertinent info on it -- along with the appropriate amount of money – you will be entered into a tournament and given the promotional foil that was mentioned earlier. I am obliged to point out here that you may not use the foil in any of your Sealed Decks. Just tuck it in your trade binder and see what it can fetch for you later. In the meanwhile you need to get into your seat – they are going to be handing product out any minute now.



Assuming you are playing in the Midnight Madness, Big Flight or Regular Flight you will receive one tournament pack and two booster packs of *Ravnica*. As soon as you are told you can open the product you will immediately sort the cards into eight piles; five piles for the single colored cards, one for gold cards, one for artifacts, and one more for lands. Once you have the eight piles you should alphabetize each pile by the card names. This will make things go quicker if you are asked to register the contents of your deck on a checklist form.



In some cases you may be asked to swap the deck you have registered randomly with other players in your tournament. The idea behind deck registration and deck swaps is to ensure the integrity of the tournament. Early on in the weekend organizers will usually forgo a deck swap since it is the first time the cards are seeing play. As the weekend progresses and players have accumulated a fair number of

cards deck swaps are usually added into the mix so that you will know that the ridiculous rare that pummeled you got into your opponent's card pool by chance and not design.

Speaking of your card pool. Here is a common card that you are likely to see. It is a great on-board trick that keeps coming back for me. This trick is sure to make it into any deck utilizing the black-green Golgari guild. (I am so bitter about not getting to feature a regular preview in my weekly column that I make you wade through 2000 words before I gave up the goods. To be fair, the cards I get to preview in these primers may not be flashy bomb rares but they are always staple commons that get played in any deck with access to its colors. This card is no exception.)



I know this all seems like a lot to absorb but it actually it ends up going by pretty quickly. Before you know it you will have a pool of cards in front of you that needs to be honed down to a 40-card minimum deck. There are going to be so many cards in this set that you are going to want to play with and you are going to remember that I said a 40-card *minimum* deck.

You are going to be tempted to play more cards.

Please don't do this.

If you must...if there is one card you just can't cut...you can play 41. I have done it myself more times than I care to admit. Please don't play more than that though. I know you want to have fun with your cards but it is no fun to have crummy draws and not see your very best cards. If you want help figuring out what your very best cards are I suggest you take a stroll through [Scott Wills' most enlightening archives](#) and see what guidelines he has used when evaluating new sets in the past. The cards may be different but the same rules generally apply.

As far as building your deck there are a couple of rough guidelines that you always fall back on. I have no idea how many colors to tell you to play. Normally I encourage people to stick to two colors as close as possible. If necessary a third color can be splashed for removal. But, I have no clue if that applies to this format or not since this is a multi-color set. I'm guessing that three-color decks will be much more common than in "normal" sets, and that from the likes of what we've seen so far of *Ravnica*, I'd guess that there will be a lot of color-helping available to make that work. I like to play 17 or 18 mana sources. You can go down as low as sixteen lands provided you have some kind of mana creatures or Wild Growth effects to make up for the shortfall (at, typically, at least a 2 per land removed ratio), but remember that the more color requirements your deck has, the harder it is to cheat on your number of mana sources. Of the 22 cards remaining in the deck I like to have about 17 of them be creatures with the remainder dedicated to removal, card drawing, and counter magic. But, as I mentioned, those are general guidelines to say the least. Each set has its own peculiar twists and this set seems to have them in spades. Play it by ear, play enough mana, and have fun.

Quick Checklist of Things to Bring

With an eye toward streamlining your preparation for the event, here is a quick checklist of things to bring with you to the tournament.

Pen and paper - While you can probably find this at the site it is better to take a few minute looking through your junk drawer and grabbing a writing utensil. It will speed up getting through the door and registering your deck. Once you start playing, pen and paper is the best possible way to keep track of both players' life totals. Heck, you might even want to take notes and write a tournament report later on.



DCI membership # (if you already have one) - The organizer should be able to look this up for you but it is going to slow you down (and everyone on line behind you) and keep you from getting your mitts on the new cards. Take a couple of minutes before you leave and make sure you have it with you.

Money - Nothing more embarrassing than getting to the tournament with nothing but a fist full of pocket lint. Check the entry fees for the tournaments you want play in and plan accordingly. You should also make sure you have money to get there and back (public transportation, tolls, parking fees, gas). Food and drink are also things to budget for as you could be there for a while although you could just pack a lunch. There are almost always dealer tables on site as well and you may want to finish off a deck you have been working on – plan accordingly.

Trade binder/Price guide - Don't bring everything you own unless you are looking to sell to one of the dealers who buy bulk. Things can get a little hectic and you don't want to have to keep track of a bunch of different boxes and binders. Cull your trade stuff down to one binder and work from that. You should also bring some kind of current price guide. The more information you bring into a trade the better you will do. REMINDER - Almost every TO everywhere does not allow players to buy or sell cards at their events unless it is from a dealer that has paid for space to set up. Trading on the other hand is always acceptable and encouraged.

Dice - Not mandatory, but having some dice or other objects you can use as counters or tokens can often be handy for events like this. It's tough to know with a new set how many counters and such you'll be using, so it's a good idea to come prepared just in case.

Directions/Phone # of event location - Make sure you double check your directions before you leave. Call the event location if possible and make sure you bring that number with you in case you get lost.

Wrapping Up

Ravnica is already being called one of the coolest sets ever, and you only get one chance for something like a prerelease weekend and then it's gone. If you've been to one of these before, you already know how much fun they can be. If you've never managed to get yourself to a prerelease event, I hope you'll finally take the plunge and find out why so many players list these as their favorite events to attend. I also urge you to check back into these forums after you have attended your local event to share your experiences. Due to a wedding I don't think I can make it either day (I am actually going to try and sneak away for a little while though), so I'm eager to hear about the new cards, new deck archetypes, and your experiences with the adventure you chose to pursue.