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First Response

Brian David-Marshall
The Week That Was
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Several times a year, for every set since *Legions*, I write a primer in order to convince players who have never been to a Prerelease to try their hand at one of the most relaxed and enjoyable tournaments that organized play has to offer. It is actually pretty challenging to write, as I have to say the same basic things each time while trying to avoid the urge to simply hit Ctrl-C and then Ctrl-V from the previous version.

After all, there couldn't be that many people still out there who have never been to a prerelease before, right? In an effort to answer that question, I asked primer readers to write to me with their tournament experiences. I was happy and surprised by the volume of email I received and am going to be excerpting the highlights this week.



One of the first emails came from David Brunton, who overcame his apprehension of being overwhelmed by bloodthirsty competitors and a poor expected value.

Thanks for writing your article, I was originally set on not attending, due to the fear of walking away from what I thought would be a Pro-player heavy environment, leading to very few cards for my entry fee at the end of the day.

However, the event was great. Beforehand I had only attended 3 FNM's. I entered two casual flights, both netting me a tourney pack and three boosters, followed by two boosters for each flight at the prize presentation ...

...So heaps of thanks for the article, it helped me to get there and also prompted me to search the net for beginners hints. As you said, the judges and advanced players were full of helpful advice and suggestions on the many topics that arose. I may not have enough money to enter the 2HG tomorrow, but I'm definitely headed for the next prerelease or any tournaments that come my way :D

I received plenty of emails from players who had played before, including Ben Conolly from Sydney, Australia, who gave me a heads-up about playing with slivers in this new format. Apparently he built a deck around **Hivestone** and got into an interesting board where everyone's creatures were able to regenerate, had vigilance, could wiggle their ears, and recite the Greek alphabet backwards.

For the purposes of this column I am going to stay focused on players who were writing about their first Prerelease experience -- or in the case of Jon Barr, their first tournament experience ever:

Hey man. I've been playing MTG for about two months now and had the opportunity to attend my first prerelease (and my first Magic event period, for that matter) this weekend. How fun has it been? So fun that I'm writing this between rounds of my first ever 32-person flight!

*I won my first four games, only to lose my next four, but that doesn't really matter to me right now. I'm meeting a lot of people who have been playing for a loooooong time, and everyone has been helpful in telling me where to go, what to do and (more often than I'd like to admit) reminding me to gain life with my **Essence Warden**.*

The judges have been excellent as well; quick to respond to game-play questions and looking quite dapper in their matching shirts.

Thanks for your article which gave me some good tips on making decks and took away most of the hesitation I had felt. This will definitely not be my last prerelease.



John RM included the deck he built in his email:

*The Planar Chaos prerelease this weekend was my first prerelease, and I definitely am going to go for Future Sight! I didn't win any prizes, but I did fairly well with my deck (2-1-1) and got a lot of good cards. My deck ended up being green-white-black, but I didn't have many mana problems, and it had a good mix of cards. Planar Chaos is a great set. I like its timeshifted better than Time Spiral's, and I got some great cards from it, like **Kor Dirge**, **Groundbreaker**, and 2 **Voidstone Gargoyles**. The prerelease was an awesome experience, and I intend to go to future ones.*

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John RM

Planar Chaos Prerelease Sealed Deck



Main Deck

41 cards

5 Forest
6 Plains
6 Swamp

17 lands

1 Assembly-Worker
2 Deadly Grub
1 Durkwood Baloth
1 Errant Doomsayers
1 Giant Dustwasp
1 Mire Boa
1 Penumbra Spider
1 Rathi Trapper
1 Revered Dead
1 Trespasser II-Vec
2 Voidstone Gargoyle

13 creatures

1 Cradle to Grave
1 Dawn Charm
1 Evolution Charm
1 Kor Dirge
1 Lotus Bloom
1 Melancholy
1 Phthisis
1 Premature Burial
1 Saltblast
1 Seal of Primordium
1 Tendrils of Corruption

11 other spells

Sideboard

0 sideboard cards

Believe me, I know how hard it is to stick to the 40-card minimum rule when building a deck -- especially when you have so many exciting new cards to choose from. David Castlen opened an impressive pool of cards and wrote to explain why he could not stay within those confines:

When I opened my boosters I was very impressed by the artwork and thought, "How am I going to know what to select?" Then in my last booster there she was...Akroma, Angel of Fury I also noticed Groundbreaker, thinking I had my colors and then I saw a lot of blue that would serve me well such as Serra Sphinx.

I went from there and following your guidance stuck to a 41-card deck :).

Benjamin Landers wrote a lengthy recap of his first tournament experience -- an experience that he shared with some pals and his girlfriend Amber:

I'd like to start off by saying it was an incredible experience and I definitely plan on attending more events in the future.

I cracked open my packs and set to work, only to be discouraged by the sheer lack of any "bombs" that would shove my deck into one color or another, so I ended up with a blue/green/white weenie deck based around getting some tiny flyers and pumping them big. I came into it all hoping for a single victory and I managed that in the first match going 2-0 against a gathering of slivers. My second match I wasn't so lucky, getting color screwed the first game and then the second game getting stuck on two lands against a ridiculous rebel deck, dropping my overall record to 1-1.

Afterwards I got some time to catch up with my buddies to find out that they had similar stories, leaving three of us at 1-1 records. My girlfriend (Amber), who had never built a deck before, had only recently picked up the game and had gotten serious about it in the past few months. I was honestly very impressed with the deck she managed to pull together, it stomped mine in a game we played just for kicks. But sadly in the tournament she got stuck with some bad draws and ended up losing twice.

At this point it was about time for registration of the Two-Headed Giant tourney to begin, we had come more so for that anyway and it was going to overlap our current flight, so the four of us dropped the flight to join in the Two-Headed Giant fun. Myself and Ams (Amber) joined to form team BAMS, and my other two friends Travis and Carson decided on team Cheesecake. Sadly the giant tournament started a full hour-and-a-half late, which would've given us enough time to at least play another few rounds in, if not finish, the flight we dropped.

Nevertheless, we eventually did get out cards passed out and ripped double Akroma, Angel of Fury, along with a Kaervek the Merciless and other decent and dirty red/black removal. Needless to say I tossed a red/black deck together that was much better than what I had for the main flight, we had so many cards that I couldn't bear not to play I ended up with a 49-card deck instead of the recommended 40. Then Ams surprised me yet again when she pulled together a green/white deck that meshed perfectly with the red/black I had put together. It combined big-butted and flying



defensive critters with a *Jedit Ojanen of Efrava* (with almost everyone playing some form of green), she was able to keep us alive and if need be swing in for damage until *Akroma* or *Pyrohemia* could pop up for the kill.

Our first match was fairly intense, and both teams were down to about 20 or so life remaining. I had an *Akroma* and *Pyrohemia* in play with four swamps and four mountains, Ams had a few 2/4 creatures and *Jedit*, all of our opponents creatures had a max of 5 defense and I drew a *Paradise Plume*. Dropped it for red, Pyro'd for 5 killing all their creatures (and most of Ams's), dealing 10 to each team (as it does damage to each player), and then swung in for 6 with *Akroma*, we pass turn, they pass turn, and we Pyro again scooping up our first Two-Headed Giant victory.

In the second round, Ben's team found themselves at an early disadvantage when they were able to mug a dragon with an unmorphed *Akroma, Angel of Fury*. Unfortunately their bomb was diffused and reassembled on the other side of the table with a combination of *Lim-Dul* and *Rough/Tumble*. Ben had a hard time feeling bad about it though:

It didn't feel like a loss, coming back from such a heavy deficit and threatening to take the win. We were psyched, especially after getting some support and props on our decks from the veteran players we were up against.

*The third match it was the same old story. Ams slapped down an unblockable *Jedit* and I managed a *Pyrohemia* to continually ruin the board for the opponents and drop both teams down a bunch. We managed to swing in for our second victory, putting us at 2-1 and sending us home with an 8-booster victory bonus. Which was well beyond my expectations coming into the event, it being the first sanctioned event for all of us (excluding my friend Travis who had attended one years ago).*



Taurean Douglas also chose Two-Headed Giant as his first event of choice. A ten-year veteran of many a kitchen table duel, this was the first time Taurean ventured into sanctioned territory. He brought his friend Jerry, who had only been playing for two weeks. The team did not fare well, failing to notch any wins in the tournament. But that was just fine with him as he felt that the two players learned a lot about card valuation, putting enough land in your deck, and that the 40 life in Two-Headed Giant makes for a very different format than individual ones. He wrapped up with a message for someone in R&D:

Please strangle the designer who thought it would be clever to make a suspend card that gives a player 20 life. This was absolutely devastating in this format. The games are hard enough, adding 20 more life made it next to impossible :-)

All in all, we had fun, and will probably be doing this in the future as well. Also, when will 2HG become a regular tournament event?

Actually Taurean, Two-Headed Giant is a tournament staple these days. There will be Two-Headed Giant Champs coming up soon. There is a whole round of Two-Headed Giant PTQs starting in March, and two Grand Prix (Amsterdam and Massachusetts) that will feed Pro Tour-San Diego.

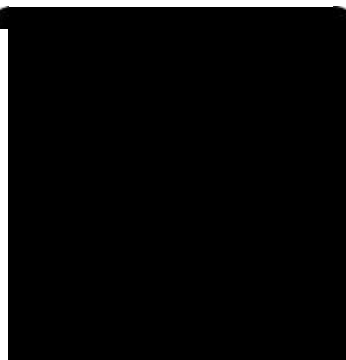
Jose Becerra from Mexico also wrote in about how it chaffs to keep the deck down to 40 cards -- especially when people were doing well with substantially larger builds:

*After reading your article "Planar Chaos Prerelease Primer", I felt the urge to tell my story. You see, I'm a relatively new **Magic** player (meaning I started playing in the Ravnica block), and I've always kept to casual play; however, I decided to take the next step and attend my first sanctioned event. Although I wasn't exactly sure I'd win even the first round, at least I would get new cards! Along with my brother (he's 14 and I'm 18, by the way), we created our DCI account, got our promo, tournament pack and boosters, and started tinkering our 40-card decks... at least that's what we tried, since all you guys suggested to keep it in 40. Big was our surprise when at the end of the day the winner of most tournaments had around 55 cards!*

Isamu Inoue faced off against one of those towering infernos in his first-ever round of Prerelease play. He went on to do pretty well and included his decklist:

*I won the whole thing. Today was my first prerelease ever! I made a black-green splash red deck with two *Rathi Trapper*. They probably won me all the games. I splashed red for some nice removal -- *Sudden Death*, *Dead/Gone* and *Rift Bolt*.*

*First round I met a boy about my age or less playing a deck of 50 cards. Yeah I know, lucky, lucky! I crushed him, no more to say. Then I got paired against Michael, playing a monowhite deck. I could not believe my own eyes or ears! The deck was really explosive and consistent. He had cards like *Gauntlet of Power*, making the game a hell. I won however, with a flying green guy. Next game ended in a draw, because we ran out of time.*



The next round was against Morten. Can't really remember much from this, but I won the first game, because he mulliganed down to five cards. Next game was a little slower and it ended in a draw, like the round before. I went undefeated to the next round against Emil. The first game dragged out really long. I won however and the next game ended in a draw -- still undefeated. Next game was against Matthias Kure. We discussed for some time if we should draw. We drew and I got first place, Michael (the lucky monowhite guy) was number two and Matthias Kure number three, I think.



Isamu Inoue		
Planar Chaos Prerelease Decklist		
Main Deck	Sideboard	
41 cards	0 sideboard cards	
7 forest	1 Cradle to Grave	
5 mountain	1 Dead/Gone	
6 Swamp	1 Harmonize	
18 lands	1 Melancholy	
1 Basal Sliver	1 Mwonwuli Acid-Moss	
1 Bog Serpent	1 Rift Bolt	
1 Brute Force	1 Sudden Chock	
1 Giant Dustwasp	1 Undying Rage	
1 Havenwood Wurm	1 Verdant Embrace	
1 Mana Skimmer	9 other spells	
1 Mire Boa		
1 Nantuko Shaman		
1 Nightshade Assassin		
1 Penumbra Spider		
2 Rathi Trapper		
1 Trespasser II-vec		
1 Wall of Roots		
14 creatures		

Two-Headed Giant certainly seemed like the starter tournament of choice, as you can play with a more experienced partner (or at least share the growing pains with a friend, as Tony Ogborn did). I thought it was very interesting how many players took more away from their losses than they did their victories:

I should tell you about the first loss. The first loss was pretty much to Jaya Ballard. The people we played against used her last effect - deal 6 damage to everything but had a card attached to her - Vampiric Link -- that had them gain life equal to the amount of damage she dished out. That team ended up with about 130 life. The second round that we won, was against one of those dragons that was 6/6, and could pay a certain amount to put +1/+1 counters on it, and my friend luckily drew a Phthisis, and used it on the dragon. The third match was very close, and it ended with the enemy having 5 life, and us losing all of it. My day was quite eventful, and I am pretty sure the prerelease made me a Magic fan for life. Thanks Brian for helping me with having standards for the deck I built, I wouldn't have been able to be half as successful without it.



Charles Di Castiglione shared not only his decklist -- which he explains was built poorly -- but his actual card pool so you can see what you would have done in his situation.

I have only recently started to play Magic. Earlier this month I took part in my first organized games of Magic at my local FNM, my friends and I having taught ourselves how to play only a month beforehand. I was thoroughly whumped but after another FNM event (at which I acquitted myself, I felt, with some

dignity) and some reading up (the [Magic Academy series of articles](#) being particularly useful) I felt ready to try my hand at limited for the first time yesterday at a prerelease tournament in the UK.

The day was going to be a long one, including my first experiences with Limited, in which we were to play a six-round Sealed Deck Tournament followed by (for those wishing to stay) a Booster Draft event. After arriving early to ensure that I was able to register and some fairly lengthy shenanigans logging decks and listening to rules, we got to the part of the month I had so eagerly anticipated: opening my Time Spiral sealed deck and three Planar Chaos boosters. The first thing to do was to scan and sort my card pool and the first major challenge was to build a deck in 25 minutes.

Here is a list of the cards I opened:

Lands/Artifacts/Gold	White	Blue
Molten Slagheap	Amrou Scout	Crookclaw Transmuter
Urza's Factory	Chronosavant	Riftwing Cloudskate
Candles of Leng	Cloudchaser Kestrel	Screeching Sliver
Jhoira's Timebug	D'Avenant Healer	Shadow Sliver
Prismatic Lens	Duskriider Peregrine	Slipstream Serpent
Triskelavus	Gaze of Justice	Snapback
Lightning Angel	Plated Pegasus	Wipe Away
Necrotic Sliver	Zealot il-Vec	Erratic Mutation
	Crovax, Ascendant Hero	Gossamer Phantasm
	Dawn Charm x 2	Pongify
	Mana Tithe	Reality Acid
	Mesa Enchantress	Synchronous Sliver x 2
	Pallid Mycoderm	Veiling Oddity x 2
	Poultice Sliver	Venarian Glimmer
	Sinew Sliver	Wistful Thinking
	Stonecloaker	
	Sunlance	
	Voidstone Gargoyle	
	Whitemane Lion	
Black	Red	Green
Cyclopean Giant	Bogardan Rager	Aether Web
Magus of the Mirror	Grapeshot	Chameleon Blur
Psychotic Episode	Ground Rift	Durkwood Tracker
Skittering Monstrosity	Lightning Axe	Glass Asp
Traitor's Clutch	Subterranean Shambler	Herd Gnarr
Trespasser il-Vec	Undying Rage	Scarwood Treefolk
Urborg Syphon-Mage	Volcanic Awakening	Strength in Numbers
Stupor	Brute Force	Citanul Woodreaders
Damnation (Foil!)	Dead/Gone	Essence Warden
Brain Gorgers	Dust Corona	Giant Dustwasp x 2
Circle of Affliction	Fury Charm	Vitaspore Thallid
Dash Hopes	Simian Spirit Guide x 2	
Extirpate	Stingscourger	
Kor Dirge		
Melancholy		
Ridged Kusite		
Shrouded Lore		
Spitting Sliver		
Waning Wurm		

Charles Di Castiglione

Planar Chaos Prerelease Decklist

Main Deck
43 cards

- 2 Island
- 1 Molten Slagheap
- 6 Mountain
- 7 Plains
- 7 Swamp

23 lands

- 1 Circle of Affliction
- 1 Damnation
- 1 Extirpate
- 1 Prismatic Lens
- 1 Stupor
- 1 Sunlance

6 other spells

- 1 Brain Gorgers
- 1 Crovax, Ascendant Hero

Sideboard

0 sideboard cards

- 1 Duskrider Peregrine
- 1 Lightning Angel
- 1 Magus of the Mirror
- 1 Plated Pegasus
- 2 Simian Spirit Guide
- 1 Skittering Monstrosity
- 1 Stonecloaker
- 1 Subterranean Shambler
- 1 Trespasser il-Vec
- 1 Voidstone Gargoyle
- 1 Waning Wurm

14 creatures

Matt Romeo, a married player with a couple of kids, wrote to share his first tournament experience. Like Charles, he shared a detailed account of his experience that is too long to fully reprint in this column but he closed with what I thought to be the most fitting paragraph to end this column on, after getting one win, one loss, and one draw:

The day was long already and the combination of hunger and the fact that I couldn't see a more fitting ending from my first tournament than a 1-1-1 record caused me to leave. I walked by vendors dealing big cards and small, and kids and adults having great excitement in buying, selling and trading cards and remembered why this game is so great. The fun of collecting rarities and building a portfolio coupled with the idea that one deck and a couple of boosters could arm you with an instant winner makes MTG the joyful addiction that it is. As I left I spoke with a dad who was there with his son and even spotted a few people with wedding bands. I realized that there are a million ways to spend one's time and that life is full of choices. MTG is a great choice for spending some of that time regardless of your social status or cast in life...it is a great game for those who revere the characters and stories as it is a great game for those who like to strategize and pair cards. I will definitely attend more tournaments and want to thank you for giving me the motivation to attend my first.

Firestarter: Build Your Own

Charles Di Castiglione ended up making a self-described rookie error and built his deck with 43 cards - 20 spells and 23 lands. Use the forums to talk about how you would have built the deck.

*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, the publishing house that is releasing Michael J. Flores: Deckade.*



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