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The Magic Community is Divided, but Nothing is Being Done.

Magic: The Gathering is a trading card game released in 1993 by Richard Garfield and now developed by Wizards of the Coast. One of the key features of this game is how cards are distributed. Mainly you have Booster packs which have random cards from a single set, and there are always 15 commons, 3 uncommon, 1 rare/mythic rare, and sometimes a pack contains a “Premium Card” or one that has special foiling. In this game players build decks of 60 cards, of which one card cannot appear more than 4 times, and the cards from which sets you can use are defined by the formats guidelines. Because of how booster packs are disturbed and how decks are built; there is a strong secondary market for the cards. That’s how most cards are acquired by people, either buying the cards themselves from a store, or another player, rather than buying boosters hoping to get the card you need. One major flaw is this secondary market is completely unregulated. Cards should only be valued at what people will pay for them, however that is not always the case. With older cards, it is very easy for one source to control the majority of the market on the card. When they do, they can set whatever price they want for it and people are pretty much forced to pay it if they want to play it. While this may seem like just a fiscal issue, it stretches beyond that. There are many articles and forum posts claiming it’s from the people who speculate on the market. Or it’s from the unwillingness of Wizards to reprint certain cards. The problem is there’s a lot of compelling reasons from all sides, and it just divides the community up without really getting into the actual problem.

In the article Wizards Always Hurts the One’s they Love Most, posted to the news section on mtgsalvation, author Teia Rabishu (A member of the staff of the site) explains the concept of the reserved list. What essentially happened is that Wizards reprinted cards they knew were fetching high prices on the secondary market. With that, the prices of said cards crashed. A lot of them were now worthless. This made a lot of people angry because cards they paid $50+ were now only worth as much as the cardboard they were printed on. So Wizards made a promise. They devised a list of cards that would not be allowed to be reprinted, they called this the reserved list. While the actual reserved list only covers 571 cards, the idea of it is expanded to many more cards. For example, the card Force of Will is heavily played in the legacy format, and while it is not officially listed on the reserve list, it has not been reprinted since its initial printing. Since there are very low amounts of the card and the fact that it is needed if you want to play certain decks, they cost about $100 each. Wizards knows this, and while they won’t ever say they will not reprint it, the chance they will is close to zero. They made people mad by doing exactly that, reprinting cards that were valuable, and they saw the effects of when supply outweighs demand.

Teia Rabishu says the problem with prices is caused by the reserved list alone, but also by the people who speculate on cards. These people see a deck starting to perform well, so they buy up all the cards in the deck before other people can thereby inflating the price and them making a nice profit. This is where she uses her logos to back up her claim. Relating various cards such as Pearl Lake Ancient to a bubble. That is there is an initial buyout, and with a low supply, the price is free to rise. It will continue to rise until the bubble ‘pops’ and the price crashes. She also uses specific examples of expensive and very playable cards like Goblin Guide and Snapcaster Mage, which don’t ever go back as low as their original price after the bubble pops. She uses this to introduce the concept of price memory. Essentially, it’s the idea that since magic cards are inherently playable, the demand won’t change for a card versus the demand for an investment that just sits there such as gold or bitcoin. She uses logos again to explain why speculators like magic, because even if they missed selling their cards before the bubble pops they still will be able to profit.

In the following sections she uses pathos to explain some common tactics to sell cards while they’re hot. The first of which being the pump and dump. The way she writes the introduction instantly makes you recall to the time you read an article on ChannelFireball or StarCityGames on the ‘next hot deck’ and bought some cards for them. She also introduces the idea of the ‘poop and scoop’ in the same manner, albeit it is a less common occurrence. She uses these to bring you onto her side that people artificially inflating card prices are ruining the game for some people, and while she had the logos and the evidence to back up her claim. It’s not the only reason.

Wizards is a business, and while unfortunate for people who seek to do nothing but play with cards, they want to seek as many profits as any other business. They want to maximize them as much as possible. Based on the article How Wizards Manages its Savings Account, they have to worry about more than getting some of their fans mad. They have to worry about maximizing profits. Sure they could just reprint a whole slew of valuable cards in the next Modern Masters, or Commander set. However, they won’t. Sets like those always include some sort of valuable cards already. That’s why sets like them exists. Wizards knows they’re going to sell anyway, so why put even more valuable cards in there anyway? As *SaffronOlive* put it, “Wizards can let them simmer for another year or two, reach legitimate pre-reprinting shockland prices (where they pretty much are already despite seeing a fraction of the play), stick them in the 2017 fall set and automatically have the next ‘bestselling set ever’.”

SaffronOlive, a frequent author of mtggoldfish who commonly writes on fincial aspects of the game*,* uses this analogy of a bank account. That when Wizards designs and releases a card, it’s as if they get a paycheck for the card, and some of that paycheck is put in the bank. This is a card’s “reprint equity”. He uses logos to back up this claim. He gives the example of the card Damnation. A card which many players commonly claim needs to be reprinted. He logically comes to the conclusion that it hasn’t been reprinted because it hit a point where now it would be a ‘reason to buy a set’. Previously in the article he used examples of cards such as the ‘fetches’ in Khans of Tarkir as selling sets to help further back up his claim.

Up until the last section of the article, he mainly used logos to back up his claims and get the reader on his side. Even providing very logical reasons for side cases of cards like Adarkar Valkyrie that didn’t really fit into his idea of ‘reprint equity’. However, in the last section he invoked pathos to help change the reader’s perspective on things. By relating to the reader about how they might envision sets being built and exampling through logos that it is not the case. He builds a strong case that will again pull readers to his side.

In “The Future of Modern (Masters)”, SaffronOlive makes another argument about the financial aspect of the game; however, it is not blaming anyone. Rather, it offers a suggestion that can help alleviate the problem. Ethos comes into this article a lot. Being an author who has posted a lot in the community about this, it gives him a soapbox to speak his opinion. It give shim some leverage that a normal user may not have, and allows him to convince people who might not be convinced by a random forum user. He uses logos to back up the fact that it is better to invest in legacy and vintage staples over modern staples, because modern is so volatile. While also explaining some sources of problems for the financial aspect of the game. So while not exactly like the other two articles, he still uses plenty of ethos, pathos, and logos to make a claim, and it works. I know reading through it, I was agreeing with all the points he brought up. Just like with the previous two articles.

The Magic community’s opinion on where the finical problems come from are very split. Both sides of the argument have very completing arguments, and all leverage the available ethos, logos, and pathos they have available to them to get them onto their side. However, I don’t think pointing fingers will really do much, if at all. I think future articles should go in the direction of “The Future of Modern (Masters)” in that it leverages its ethos, logos, and pathos to help provide a solution to help alleviate the situation, if possible. That’s a better use of the author’s positions than just explaining the source of a problem.

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