



## SHOP MAKES 'MAGIC' PAY

**CARDS**, at left, are laid out as Zack Houser, Girardville, plays "Magic: The Gathering" on a recent Saturday at The Players Guild at the Columbia Mall in Buckhorn. **Another photo, back page.**

PHOTOS BY M.J. MAHON



**W**alter Harrell, above, Elizabeth, N.J., plays with other enthusiasts during a tournament at The Players Guild in Columbia Mall. **Players, from left in photo at left, Gabe McMullen, A.J. Gendreau, Ryan Bergeman, Phillip Bergeman and Kevin McKee play outside the store.**



Press Enterprise/M.J. Mahon

**ERIC "EJ" SMITH**, left, and wife **Janna** are shown during a tournament in their Columbia Mall gaming shop, The Players Guild. **More photos, front page.**

## Game 'I like it for the strategy'

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Like dragons or elves or cast spells, all with the intent of reducing their opponents' life points.

While it may sound like Dungeons and Dragons, the players say it's closer to a combination of chess and poker.

"I like it for the strategy," said Justin Conant, 25, of Bloomsburg.

Griffiths said one frequent player in Bloomsburg began entering poker tournaments to make money. He uses the money to buy more Magic cards.

While players usually use only 60 cards during any one Magic game, more than 10,000 have been created since the game was invented. Each has its own special features. And players combine them into a 60-card deck in hopes of using those features.

One player may try to sap an opponent's life by using a variety of creatures. Another may concentrate solely on spells.

Conant said he has nearly 40 3-inch binders worth of cards to choose from at home.

### Mythic rare

Smith is in business to provide players those cards.

Like baseball cards, they vary in price based on their rarity. The most common go for a nickel each.

Some rare cards — the equivalent of a rookie card for a current all-star — can sell for \$10 or more. "Mythic rare" cards — think a rookie card for a lesser-known Hall of Famer — can fetch up to \$80.

Then there are the Honus Wagners of the Magic world — cards produced when the game was still young, which today are extremely rare and powerful.

Those cards, with names like "Black Lotus" and "Mox Sapphire," can sell for \$800 and more.

### 50-50

Smith sells rare and mythic rare cards, but doesn't have the most valuable ones.

"It's not worth the risk," Smith said. It's a big investment with relatively few people who want to buy them.

He makes about 50 percent of his income selling cards.

The other 50 percent comes from hosting tournaments, where players square off in hopes of winning a rare card. That's what has been

drawing crowds to the mall, Smith says.

On Jan. 26, a tournament paired with an early release of new cards drew 42 people, some from as far away as Ohio.

They overflowed the store at the mall, gathering around a table in the concourse as well.

For more regular tournaments, Smith said he draws about 12 participants, who pay entry fees from \$5 to \$25. The value of the card is usually two to three times the entry fee.

His wife tends not to play competitively.

"She'll play at home, for fun," he said. But "she's been very supportive" of the store.

### 'A passion'

Besides running his shop, Smith is also finishing up an education bachelor's degree at Bloomsburg University and is student teaching.

He thinks he'll keep running The Players Guild even after he gets his degree.

"It's a passion, and they always say to do what you love."

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## Fantasy card game draws regular crowd to Columbia Mall store

By **PETER KENDRON**  
Press Enterprise Writer

**HEMLOCK TWP.** — Three times a week, The Players Guild store at the Columbia Mall hosts crowds of 10 to 40 who play a card game where they do battle using orcs, elves and magic spells.

But the shop exists due to something even more powerful — a wife's ultimatum.

About a year ago, Eric "EJ" Smith's wife, Janna, told him he could keep playing "Magic: The Gathering" only if he could make money doing it.

Today, he says it was more a joke than an order. But Smith, 25, also says he's "making a living" from his store based in the old Claire's. It's been there since June.

And he's been drawing crowds on a regular basis to a mall that doesn't often see them.

Smith is cashing in on a game that has existed for more than 15 years, but maintains a devoted following.

A few of those gathered for a tournament on a recent Monday night said they had spent more than \$1,000 on their collections of cards over the past decade.

Shawn Griffiths, who works as a supervi-

sor at Northwestern Academy during the day, brings his display cases of valuable cards with him on tournament nights. Some sell for \$5. Others, which can give players a significant leg up in the game, can sell for more than \$300.

"I keep playing because otherwise all this will be going to waste," he said.

### Plainswalker

In a game of Magic, each player takes the role of a wizard called a "plainswalker." They use their cards to summon creatures

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