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Planeswalkers of Flagstaff

Megan Troutman Jan 26, 2015

Colorful, sleek comics line the walls as the welcoming scent of pizza fills the room. Although there is subtle tension in the air, the players are excited for what is in store for the next several hours — this was the midnight pre-release tournament for the trading card game, Magic The Gathering, or otherwise known as “Magic.”

Magic is a trading card game where each player tries to eliminate their opponent with powerful spells and creatures, knocking them from 20 life points to zero life points. The players are known fondly as “Planeswalkers,” and are the beating heart of this prevalent community of the game. No two games are ever the same, as new decks are constructed on the spot and new strategies are plotted spontaneously.

Cab Comics, Flagstaff’s local comic book store, hosted this midnight pre-release event on Jan. 16 - 17. In order for the tournament to be official, the event required a certified Magic judge.

“I’m just a person that is versed in the rules and I’ve gone through certain tests . . . to be certified as a judge,” judge Gregg Cartwright said.

Cartwright enjoys judging Magic events. Being passionate about the game himself, Cartwright was excited for the midnight premier event.

“[I’m excited] to see the new cards. I really love new, interesting mechanics,” Cartwright said. “Especially as a judge, I really like those nit-picky, bizarre, rules.”

The judge explained that Magic used to come out with new cards every three to four months. However, in 2015, the producers of Magic, also known as Wizards of the Coast, decided to speed up the process. Now they are going to have two version releases and two sets of cards for each version, then immediately start a new game.

“They found out that [this new process] keeps people interested, keeps things new, and really just makes the game more fresh and interesting for players,” Cartwright said.

In order to keep players intrigued with the game, pre-release tournaments are scheduled across the nation. With Cab Comics convenient location, many college students are drawn to the events.

“I’ve played since I was a kid, so this has always been a really big part of my life,” senior environmental sustainability major Ryan Singer said. “I don’t think I’ve ever missed a week to play magic.”

When asked how many events Singer has attended to play Magic, his response was “hundreds.” Although hundreds was an exaggeration, Singer has attended multiple events with Cab Comics in particular.

“I like to play and have fun tricking my opponents,” Singer said.

While the Magic community is thriving with eager players, each player has their own story behind being introduced to the game.

“A lot of people have family who’ve played it before them,” Singer’s opponent Jarid McNamara said. “We play Magic, so when we see a tournament or a new set coming out, you just look for who has the pre-release, and then you go.”

McNamara is from Cottonwood, Ariz. Motivated by his passion for the game, he drove an hour to attend this tournament at Cab Comics.

“I just like to interact with people — it’s fun! You can play and talk smack to your opponent,” McNamara said.

Cab Comics enjoys making a lighthearted environment for these tournaments, catering to those who are looking to enjoy a night filled with positive energy.

“We’re just here to have fun and create a good environment for people to interact. So we’re going to be pretty relaxed tonight, just trying to enjoy ourselves,” Cartwright said.

Other Magic events are not as relaxed. Players will come to win with their expensive cards and pre-made decks. At this tournament event, the cards had already been ordered for the players. All they had to do was arrive at midnight, open their cards and build their decks. In the Magic community, players are aware of the importance of deck building before tournaments.

“Building the deck is one of the most strategic parts of the game — that’s what’s really going to carry you to victory or defeat. A lot of the choices really get made building the deck,” Cartwright said.

While that is one strategic opinion, McNamara shared his own insight about selecting cards.

“It’s not about what you hold, it’s about how you use them . . . [I suggest] play big things,” McNamara said. “It’s so tricky because you got to know what to sacrifice and when to take your two life!”

Each Planeswalker clearly has his or her own strategy to play the game. Singer confidently suggested to “play flying creatures.”

Even though this was just one event in the Magic community, Cab Comics hosts weekly events to Magic enthusiasts known as “Friday Night Magic.” People who have never played the game before are welcome to attend and learn the versatile rules of Magic.

Magic is certainly not exclusive to players who understand the rulebook. Everyone is encouraged to learn the ways of the Planeswalkers in this quest for victory.