



Novel Places
23341 Frederick Road
Clarksburg, MD. 20871
(301) 972-3060
pat@novelplacesusa.com



Magic, The Gathering – More Than Just a Sideline

Novel Places opened in June 2011, but during build out, a new Tournament Organizer found the store and offered to run tournaments on a regular basis. His presentation outlined the game play, space parameters, and sales potential. The venture can be on any scale, but a basic event can have as many as 14 players, lasting up to 5 hours. Sales during the first year of the store's operation account for nearly 30% of total revenue, and spike during quarterly release of new series.

Definitions – Terminology commonly used in Magic, The Gathering.

Wizards of the Coast – Company that owns Dungeons and Dragons, Magic, The Gathering, and a new game called Kaijudo. Wizards of the Coast, commonly referred to as WotC (watt-see), is owned by Hasbro.

Tournament Organizer – Individual, typically called the TO, who schedules events with the store and with Wizards of the Coast. Responsibilities include registering players with WPN, recording tournament scores, and running the event.

Wizards Play Network – A website for players, TO's and stores to connect. The website lists tournaments in a local area, and what stores offer for sale. The website is owned and accessed through Wizards of the Coast.

DCI Number – A registration card for a player to be recorded through WPN for points ranking.

Booster Pack – A sealed 15-card pack for resale. MSRP \$3.99

Booster Box – A sealed display box of 36 booster packs. MSRP \$143.64

Event Deck – A pre-built 60-card deck for resale. MSRP \$24.99

Fat Pack – Package includes player's guide, card box, 9 booster packs, 80-card basic land pack, life counter, and 2 deck boxes. MSRP \$39.99

Intro Pack – A 60-card deck, plus a booster pack. MSRP \$12.99

Sleeves – A plastic protector for each card. Average price is \$.10/sleeve (Sold in packs)

Binders – Notebook to store card collections.

Deck Boxes – Storage box for a player's deck. Variety of designs and materials for resale.

Card Terminology – Lands, commons, uncommons, rares, foils, are types of cards that relate to value and use in the game.

Game Formats – Standard, constructed, draft, and sealed are common playing formats determined by the TO.

The Game

Magic, The Gathering is decades old and has a strong following. The series of cards are designed around a saga between good and evil, involving all manner of creatures, wizards, witches, warriors, etc. Based on Dungeons & Dragons, and Lord of the Rings, the card game perpetuates itself with quarterly releases of new cards using ongoing characters, themes, and stories. There are 5 color divisions that make up decks.



Events range from casual to Grand Prix, depending on the status of the store's level. The TO will schedule an event, and each player will receive points based on a win/loss record during the tournament. The TO will log the points with WPN, and the player will be ranked nationally. Pro and semi-pro players get invited to national and world tournaments for cash prizes. The TO also records event stats with WPN for the store. The three store levels are Gateway, Core, and Advanced.

The Gateway level entitles a store to run casual events and general tournaments. Core Level stores gain access to run Friday Night Magic (FNM), Prerelease, Launch, and Gameday tournaments. The Core Level store can participate in Buy-a-Box promos, *From the Vault* merchandise, and can open a direct purchase account with WotC. Advanced Level stores can run an additional tournament for Friday Night Magic, Prerelease, and Gameday. Core Level can run one FNM each week, three Preleases for each series, one Launch Party and one Gameday. Advanced Level can run two FNM's each week, four Prereleases, two Launch Parties, and two Gameday. Advanced Level stores run the Premium, Grand Prix, and Championship Qualifiers. Advanced Level is entitled to additional *From the Vault* merchandise.

Casual events can be scheduled anytime and are free for players to gather and practice, or try new decks for tournaments. Player points and store level qualifiers are counted in casual events. Tournaments are typically scheduled at regular intervals for easier calendar planning by the store and the players. Fees are charged for tournaments to cover the cost of booster packs given to the players by the TO from store stock. If a tournament doesn't meet the number of required players, it becomes a casual event, but the fees are still charged and points are still awarded to the players and store.

A Gateway Level store qualifies for Core Level by, within 12 months, reporting a minimum of 4 events, 30 unique players to the store, and a single event with a minimum of 12 players, maintaining a delinquency rate of less than 20%, and introduce 6 new DCI players to WPN sanctioned events.

A Core Level store qualifies for Advanced Level by, within 12 months, reporting a minimum of 12 tournaments, 100 unique players to the store, and a single event with a minimum of 32 players, maintaining a delinquency rate of less than 10%, and introduce 20 new DCI players to WPN sanctioned events. Novel Places achieved Core Level in 3 months, and Advanced Level in 10 months.

Friday Night Magic requires a regular schedule. Prerelease tournaments take place the weekend before the launch of a new series of cards. Booster boxes and Intro Packs are allotted to stores by their chosen vendors for Prerelease, and are only used for the event. They cannot be sold in general until the official launch. Launch Party tournaments take place the following week. Gameday tournaments are later in the month. WotC will have a special promotion for these events.

Merchandise

*Left to right,
Fat Pack
Booster Box
Intro Packs*



Most vendors discount around 45%, and are local to the point of ground delivery the next day. Few offer net 30, and mostly take credit card or money order/certified check payments. There are no returns.

Booster Packs are a steady sale throughout the year, and card series will continue to sell until discontinued. Shelf life is about 1 year, and a good vendor or TO will warn of cards about to be discontinued. Players routinely buy Booster Boxes, and will buy at the official launch and for the next week or two. Preorders will start 2 months prior to release. A few players, and the TO, will buy a Booster Case of 6 Booster Boxes. Some vendors offer foreign language cards. Japanese cards are big sellers and hard to get.

Fat Packs, Intro Packs, and Event Decks are “one and done” print releases. These will not be available unless preordered early from the vendor. Fat Packs are good for beginner players, and usually sell out at the launch of a new series. Intro Packs are primarily used for Prerelease and Launch Parties, but can still sell weeks later. Event Decks are released and sold for Gameday tournaments. If not sold out, they have to be very popular to sell later. Intro Packs and Event Decks are pre-built decks. If a player attends several of the Prerelease and Launch Party tournaments, they will have plenty of cards to build decks. Caution should be used when ordering any of these items.

Ultra-Pro is the top brand for accessories. They offer the popular Flip Deck Box, binders, playmats, sleeves, and pocket pages for 3-ring notebooks. The five color divisions are white, blue, black, red, and green. Accessories play into this, and some include more colors. Black is the most popular, followed by red, and the least popular is white. Pink and purple are choices, possibly to indicate a blended deck. Playmats are popular to protect cards from rough tables, and to create the field of play. Ultra-Pro has a series for each color, but also has special playmats when a new card series is released.

Dragon Shield is recognized as the best card sleeve among players. Vendors have a hard time stocking this brand and black is very hard to get. Dragon Shield also sells generic playmats of the five colors.

Dice are used for life counters, and establishing who goes first. 20-sided dice are common, but the other polyhedrons will sell. Chessex is the best choice.

Books

WotC offers a series of Magic books, and R.A. Salvatore writes in this theme. The books are not popular with the players, who would prefer to spend their money on cards and accessories. Some family members prefer the books to playing the game.



The graphic novel is available on WotC's website.



Pricing

Some items can go MSRP, but discounts are common. Online stores have severe discounts, and gaming stores will have preorder discounts and release day sales.



Setting up the Store

A six-foot table will comfortably sit 2 players on each side, but 3 on each side is possible. 2 tables butted together will allow 5 players on each side. Good chairs are recommended because of the duration, but players will change locations as they compete with different opponents in each round. The image to the right shows 3 folding tables pushed against a counter to allow space for players and customers. The floor space is 12'x20'.



A space of 16'x16' is comfortable for 4 tables in 2 rows. Large tournaments can be off-site, provided it is cleared through WotC.

Players and the TO

The TO who chose Novel Places is not a Pro player, and prefers the family-oriented style of play. This is important if a store is looking for peaceful play during open hours. Noise can be an issue, regardless of the type of players, but pro players can be loud and obnoxious. A few pro players will show up, but can be managed with a good TO. The game is intended for players age 13 and over, but we regularly have 10 year olds playing. The players are predominantly male, but women do participate on a regular basis. We found a company that makes chocolate dice and more women attended that event when it was announced. If a store has a staff member plays who wants to be the TO, Magic will require time to prepare, plan, run, and talk with players through social media. It's similar to planning any book event, but is a weekly task.

Players are the most loyal customers. They will buy from the participating store to show support, rather than buy at online stores with deeper discounts. They are easily pleased. Tournaments can extend over lunch or dinner. A pizza run for \$4/slice is welcomed, and most are satisfied with cheese. We have a deli next door, and players will offer to pick up sandwiches for others, including store staff. Players are shocked we offer free sodas, water, and coffee. Gaming stores charge up to \$1 for each drink or snack. So far, my drink expense is \$10/month with an average of 10 players and 6 events. Players, and their family, will buy other books and merchandise. Most players like the bookstore as a change of venue from gaming stores.

When we moved the games upstairs, new players showed up because they heard rumors the upstairs was haunted.

The historic house next door is slated to be moved soon. The players want to know if they can run a tournament in the house while it moves.

Why Players Buy So Much

Magic is a very popular game, but it's also a big business for collectors. Powerful cards, even in new release series, can be worth tens or hundreds of dollars. Players will buy a box for a handful of collectible cards that could pay for the entire box. If a particular card suddenly becomes powerful with new decks, it could go up in value from \$.50 to \$15. Older cards, especially from the original print could approach \$1,000 per card. One regular player at our store bought a box, "cracked" the first booster pack, and found a card worth \$100.

Pros

The financial rewards are immediate. Magic sustained Novel Places year-round while it established itself in the community. The quarterly release guarantees increased sales for two to three weeks. Sales continue through the year with accessories and regular events.

Player loyalty is easily won based on comfort and inviting surroundings. The little things mean a lot. If you can't give away refreshments, they are more than happy to chip in. Players and family will shop for other merchandise, and will tell their friends.

This is obviously a Science-Fiction oriented audience. If your sales are strong in this genre, chances are customers are players. If you want to build the category, including graphic novels, this group is your strongest contributor.

The lively activity attracts others to the store. People have come in just to see what was going on.

Cons

There is the possibility the group can get too rowdy. Most will respect the store's policies, but it is important to have a good TO who respects the environment, and will monitor the players.

Tournaments typically run 4-5 hours involving 3 or 4 rounds. Scheduling other events can be a problem for smaller stores. Novel Places runs 6 events each month, with extra events at new release times. We run Casual Magic every Wednesday night near closing, which means someone has to stay late.

Space can be a problem. An average tournament of 12 players can take up the space of a typical book signing, but using tables could interfere with other shoppers. The folding tables we use can be stored in a compact area, and are light for easy set up.

WotC will restrict the new release deliveries to vendors, and you may not get your full allotment. Options are to over order and possibly sell the rest through the year, or restrict the number of pre-orders. Our vendor allows us to hold our initial order, and tell them how many to ship at a time. They effectively become our stock room, and we pay when they ship.

Theft of Magic merchandise can be an issue. It's a temptation, especially with small items like the booster packs and dice. Most items are kept behind the counter, or close to the register. Some places have a problem with people stealing the player's back pack. They'll bring their collections for trading, and that means a high value target. Don't be surprised if a player asks to have their back pack put behind the counter if they leave for a break.

Competition

WPN's website lists stores in the area that carry merchandise and run tournaments. A big gaming store will run Grand Prix and other major events on the weekend. The TO can check to prevent running an event in conflict with these tournaments. Players will play at different locations, so the pool of players doesn't have to be large. TO's can work together to schedule local events. Check pricing with nearby stores.

Prizes

Right, a playmat given to each store for the champion of the tournament.

WotC will send prizes for certain events to encourage attendance. Promotional posters and standees make great giveaways for regular events.



Support and Promotion

Wizards of the Coast depends on stores to drive sales of the games. They have an online version of Magic, but the bonuses and prizes are given at the stores. WotC will list a store on their locator. Magic players rely on the website to find stores in their area for tournament schedules and merchandise. They will send window clings, vinyl banners, and other materials to show the store is a Magic location. Upon listing, we were inundated with calls and visits for merchandise and tournament schedules.

One of our regular players is a graphic artist and makes up flyers for us, including quarter size for "counter cards". See below:




INSTRAD BLOCK

APRIL 14

 Novel Places

23341 Frederick Rd
Clarksburg, MD
301.972.3060

 **MAGIC**
The Gathering
Registration 1:00 PM / First Round 1:30 PM
\$8 + tax / 3-4 rounds, based on attendance.
Pregregister: <http://www.novelplacesusa.com/magic-registration>

 **MAGIC**
The Gathering

Standard Tournament
DECEMBER 10
Registration 1:00PM
Event Begins 1:30PM
\$8 + tax. 3-4 rounds,
based on attendance

STANDARD
WIZARD GEAR

 Novel Places

23341 Frederick Rd, Clarksburg, MD - 301.972.3060

PREREGISTER: <http://www.novelplacesusa.com/magic-registration>
PREREGISTER WITHOUT PREPAYING: <http://bit.ly/DMAStandardDec10Prereg>
Don@DonsMagicAndSundry.com

2012 CORE SET Launch Party

Planeswalker — Jace

July 18, 2011. Registration - 4, Deckbuilding - 4:30

Novel Places - 23341 Frederick Rd Clarksburg, MD 20871 (301) 972-3060

Preregister at: <http://bit.ly/DMASM12Prereg>

Don@DonsMagicAndSundry.com

DARK ASCENSION
Sealed Deck

MARCH 10

Registration 1:00 PM / Deck Construction 1:30 PM
\$25 + tax. 3-4 rounds, based on attendance.
Preregister: <http://www.novelplacesusa.com/magic-registration>

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MAGIC
The Gathering

MAGIC
The Gathering

MODERN TOURNAMENT

MARCH 24

Registration 3:00 PM / Deck Construction 3:30 PM
\$8 + tax / 3-4 rounds, based on attendance.
Preregister: <http://www.novelplacesusa.com/magic-registration>

Novel Places
23341 Frederick Rd Clarksburg, MD - 301.972.3060

MAGIC
The Gathering

INNISTRAD DRAFT

DECEMBER 24

Novel Places
23341 Frederick Rd
Clarksburg, MD
301.972.3060

Registration 1:00PM
Event Begins 1:30PM
\$15 + tax. 3-4 rounds, based on attendance

PREREGISTER: <http://www.novelplacesusa.com/magic-registration>
PREREGISTER WITHOUT PREPAYING: <http://bit.ly/DMASISDDraftDec24Prereg>
Don@DonsMagicAndSundry.com

Magic, The Gathering is more than a sideline; it's an enterprise that complements a bookstore. The participation level a store takes depends on the willingness to invest time and space. Comic book stores and other brick and mortars have moved to gaming, some morphing into full time gaming stores. These stores reach and maintain Advanced Level and run Grand Prix's in their store, rather than renting an off-site location. The industry is strong enough to support such a store, and players will go there for the large events. However, players want to play in small venues on a regular basis for the camaraderie that develops at local events. They also stand a better chance to win some of the prizes. Comments we receive from players is the same as we get from book shoppers. They love the atmosphere, charm, and friendly approach from staff. Players are thrilled at the hospitality, compared to other stores and venues. If you are able to pursue this venture, it's well worth it.

We were close enough to qualify for Advanced Level, and decided to go for it so we could say we did it. We're not necessarily interested, or prepared, in maintaining that level, but will have the advantages for one year. I created a webpage on my IndieCommerce site to encourage preregistration for events. I offer a 10% discount for online registrations only. It's a small amount, but it gets good response, and helps determine the size of the event. I also created a preorder page to get a better idea of how much to order from the vendor.

<http://www.novelplacesusa.com/magic-registration>
<http://www.novelplacesusa.com/magic-gathering-pre-release-arriving>

To learn more about Magic, The Gathering and Wizards of the Coast, go to their website:

<http://www.wizards.com/>
<http://www.wizards.com/wpn/>

To read about our TO's journey in becoming an organizer, read his 27-part blog. It's a quick read, and has the perspective of dealing with the store from the "other" side.

<http://donsmagicandsundry.blogspot.com/2011/05/road-to-wpn-part-1.html>

Feel free to contact me with any questions:

Patrick Darby
(301) 972-3060
pat@novelplacesusa.com