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QS Fundamentals eBook Series: Book 1

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Introduction

Thank you for downloading the first of three books in the QS Fundamentals eBook Series.

We've compiled five of our favorite articles from QuietSpeculation.com in a convenient digital package to help our readers become better traders. All of these articles are Insider articles—available only to our subscribers. Until now.

Sigmund Ausfresser's "How To Find a Bargain" uses real-life examples of online traders to deliver a lesson in efficiently sourcing cards, timing the markets and using the internet to find better prices.

Carl Szalich builds on Sigmund's online fundamentals and teaches a bit of financial theory by explaining how arbitrage works, in both financial and trading card markets. When demonstrating how traders can take advantage of these financial wormholes, Carl offers a word of caution, reminding us that there's no such thing as a free lunch.

Chad Havas calls a huddle and coaches us on how to be good wingmen on the trade floor. Leaving behind the heady math and high-level theory, this top-10 list is a must-read for floor traders who enjoy working in pairs. Chad hits it from all angles, from subtle psychological "Jedi mind tricks" to basic logistics.

Corbin Hosler, one of our most senior contributors, reminds traders that there's more to the market than the

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latest deck lists. Competitive players often forget that there are legions of players who love their Angels, Dragons and Elves. Knowing how to spot these diamonds in the rough can often lead to a huge profit for little investment. Corbin explains how to spot them 'in the wild'.

Patrick McGregor wins the award for "most sensational headline" and for good reason. Detailing the process that lead to a successful timing-based trade, Patrick explains how to anticipate banned/restricted list changes and how to spot the less-obvious market reactions to bannings and unbannings.

We reviewed our entire content archive dating back to 2009 with over 1000 posts to curate some of our favorites into this free eBook.

We know you'll get a ton of value out of these articles and when you do, please consider using some of your newfound wealth to hook up with the QS Insider team.

We publish stuff like this five days a week thanks to the support of our subscribers!

Thanks for reading, and please *feel free* to share this with anyone you think might like it!

-Tyler Tyssedal

Senior Editor, Quiet Speculation

How to Find a Bargain

By Sigmund Ausfresser

Dealing in cards on Magic: the Gathering Online Trading League (MOTL) is war. Often times, MOTL is where sharks go to make profits when they are too small or too busy to run an actual store. As a result, it's often quite cutthroat.

Every time I create a new sale list, there will be at least a couple members who will offer lowball prices on already-competitively priced cards. It's inescapable, and at times frustrating. I will admit that even I fall into this trap on occasion – I become greedy and attempt to find a steal on MOTL in order to garner a tiny bit of profit.

I've quickly come to the realization that MOTL is not the optimal venue for finding profitable opportunities.

Being Opportunistic vs. Being Anticipatory

During the earlier rounds of Pro Tour: Honolulu, I observed that Huntmaster of the Fells was seeing an impressively decent amount of play. What's more, many players were commenting on how powerful the card was in the given metagame at the time.

That Friday, I decided to take a small risk and purchase three copies of the Huntmaster at around \$10 each. I did so in anticipation of the card's further success. The payoff far

exceeded my expectations when eight copies of the card landed in the finals between PV and Kibler. Should the tournament seen an alternate outcome, Huntmasters may never have skyrocketed the way they had.



(Picture courtesy of cardshark.com; click to enlarge)

Profiting from these circumstances often lie in our inherent ability to predict cards' performances. For example, we could have observed a card like Elesh Norn, Grand Cenobite combos well with Unburial Rites and is quite the powerhouse even at seven mana. With this conclusion, we decide to purchase a handful of the card while it is still selling on MOTL in the \$10 range.

This path usually implies some level of risk. Acquisitions are being made before a given card has proven itself.

These anticipatory pick-ups are often what the writers here at Quiet Speculation like to elaborate upon. Our predictions are usually around cards that have the potential to double in value, often with limited downside.

But I want to take a moment to distinguish between attempting to acquire cards which may increase in price

versus acquiring discounted cards below going market price. The former often requires some risk, but quantities are normally available because a card is not yet proven. The latter involves less risk, but usually requires patience and discipline as you sort through countless collections and listings looking for the precious few with opportunity.

While the endeavor of acquiring multiple copies of Past in Flames in anticipation of a price rise (which never happened) was exciting, I often prefer my acquisitions to be driven by opportunistic pickups.

Where I Find These Opportunities

If underpriced cards were readily available, they wouldn't be underpriced. The economic law of supply and demand ensures the "invisible hand" shifts inventories until the final price is established.

But opportunities do exist. This is due to an array of factors, such as price fluctuations, limited supply or demand markets, aggressive sellers, etc. My intent is not to elaborate upon all of the reasons why opportunities exist – rather, let us operate under the assumption they do and for various reasons.

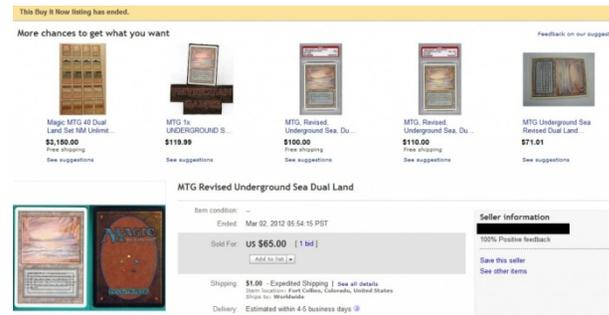
eBay

I almost never sell items on eBay. Besides the fact that the fees are far too constrictive to profit reliably, the corporation will almost always side with the buyer on any disputes. The only time I'll resort to eBay to sell is out of desperation, when

I've realized there are not many buyers for this particular item.

Buying on eBay, however, is one of my favorite pastimes. I can basically name my own price, and if the cards exceed that price I simply don't buy. It takes a minimal amount of time searching for a particular item and placing a few bids. And while it takes a lot of trial and error, persistence is often rewarded.

For proof, search any card on eBay that has some significant value. Let's use Underground Sea for example. Take a look at this ended auction:



(click to enlarge)

This was the cheapest tournament legal Underground Sea auction to have ended on eBay in the past few months. Would you have been interested in purchasing it for \$66? I sure would have! Sellers are humans and they do make mistakes. When they underprice a card, write a poor description, or take a poor picture, you can profit. But don't take my word for it – try your own search and browse completed listings. You'd be surprised how wide of a price

spread exists on many popular cards. Especially the more obscure ones.

Cardshark

I repeatedly mention this website in my articles. You may begin to think I am part owner – I assure you I am not. I do shop on this site very frequently because of the opportunities that present themselves.

Often times a new seller on Cardshark will want to rapidly accumulate feedback through sales. To do this, they charge sub-eBay prices on a handful of cards. Don't believe me? Check out this purchase I made just a couple weeks ago:

Transaction Details

Transaction ID: [REDACTED]
Date: 2/26/2012 9:36:44 AM

Seller: [REDACTED] Method: First Class Shipping: \$3.40 Insurance: \$0.00 Deliv Con: \$1.00 Item Total: \$163.90

Magic Cards in this Transaction

Quantity	Seller	Card Name	Card Set	Color	Price	Condition	Lang	Language	Notes
3	[REDACTED]	Gerralf's Messenger	Dark Ascension	Black	\$3.00	Near Mint	English		
1	[REDACTED]	Cascade bluffs	Eventide		\$6.50	Good	English		
3	[REDACTED]	Jin-Gitaxias, Core Augur	New Phyrexia	Blue	\$2.85	Near Mint	English		
1	[REDACTED]	Phyrexian Metamorph	New Phyrexia	Blue	\$3.85	Near Mint	English		
2	[REDACTED]	Phyrexian Obliterator	New Phyrexia	Black	\$9.75	Near Mint	English		
1	[REDACTED]	Inquisition of Kozilek	Rise of the Eldrazi	Black	\$1.00	Heavy Play	English		
4	[REDACTED]	Ratclret Bomb	Scars of Mirrodin	Colorless	\$4.50	Heavy Play	English		
1	[REDACTED]	Arid Mesa	Zendikar	Colorless	\$7.50	Near Mint	English		
4	[REDACTED]	Marsh Flats	Zendikar	Colorless	\$6.00	Good	English		
5	[REDACTED]	Misty Rainforest	Zendikar	Colorless	\$9.00	Good	English		
3	[REDACTED]	Verdant Catacombs	Zendikar	Colorless	\$7.00	Near Mint	English		

[Return to View Purchase History](#)

(click to enlarge)

Pretty reasonable deal, no? I've already managed to sell every card on this list for some profit except for the Cascade Bluffs, which I still own.

I'll admit, this was the largest haul I've ever made on this site. But corner cases still exist, especially when prices are on a

rapid incline. I originally found this seller because I saw he had two Phyrexian Obliterators for sale at \$9.75 and I knew they were on the rise. After browsing the rest of his inventory, I swiftly added over two dozen more cards to my cart! Next time you see some cards on the rise, check out Cardshark. The shipping costs are tough to stomach, but if you can find a large group of underpriced cards from a single seller, you stand to gain handsomely.

How do you know what card is the next big thing? QS has a proven track record for "beating the market" and getting you info on cards, long before they spike in price. Visit QuietSpeculation.com to learn more about the Magic Card Market and how QS beats the public by hours or even days.

MOTL

I began this article stating that MOTL is not an optimal place to find bargains. This is perhaps only half true. It really all depends on your approach... and how much time you have.

There are hundreds of sale lists on MOTL at any given time. A good portion of them are uninteresting to the speculator for

a variety of reasons: the list is too small, prices are too high, cards are too obscure, seller's rules are too strict, etc.

If you have enough patience and endurance, with a sprinkle of luck, you may be the winning person who is first to post on a new sale list with underpriced cards. Then, if the seller doesn't realize his prices are too low, you may make yourself a nice profitable purchase.



(click to enlarge)

The other 95% of the time you will be forced to navigate through sale lists with average prices and maybe one or two bargains. This leads to the negotiation step, which all sellers respond to differently. Make a reasonable offer to an anxious seller and you may still score a deal. Make a lowball offer to an agitated seller and prepare to be ignored or even lashed out at.

This is the reason I rely more heavily on eBay and Cardshark. I don't have the fortitude to submit offer after offer with no response. Also, as a frequent seller on MOTL, I easily become frustrated with negotiators. I don't want to be hypocritical, after all.

Summarizing

In the stock market, there is always a profitable opportunity somewhere, no matter how bullish or bearish Wall Street's sentiment is. The same is true for the Magic Card market. But in the case of the Magic Card market, there are even zero risk opportunities to acquire underpriced cards. The trick is finding them.

This article touches upon the sources I use most frequently. There are other avenues such as small-scale retailers who don't update prices often enough, sites like TCG Player and even your LGS. Even dealer booths at larger events can sometimes misprice a card or two.

Depending on how much time you have, there may be good reason to try this strategy. Search through eBay listings, look up some up-and-up cards on Cardshark, and browse a few MOTL lists. This gives you a feel for what cards should sell for and which ones are selling at a bargain. Even if you cannot identify any opportunities today, you will still learn something about the singles market. This can only make you a stronger trader.

I'll leave you with a few last tips on how I browse eBay for deals:

- Try looking for awkward quantities of a card. Often times a 2x or 3x auction will end cheaper on a per card basis than a 1x or 4x auction.
- Don't be afraid to narrow your search to Buy it Now auctions only. Some of the best deals I've found were from sellers who were overeager to sell, and so priced their cards far too low. The Underground Sea example above was a BiN auction.
- On the other hand, if you're seeking an obscure card, it is definitely best to wait for an auction. Since demand for the obscure card is likely low, there may not be enough bidders around to drive the price up. This could result in a bargain for you!
- Look for diverse lots. I once picked up an underpriced foil Scalding Tarn simply because the seller was selling it in a lot with a couple non-foils. I also found a lot of rare Innistrad lands that sold at below average prices.

Once you have acquired some inventory at bargain prices, the next logical phase is unloading them for profit. Next week I'll dive deeper into the different approaches you can take when maximizing sales and/or unloading quickly, depending on your goals.

How do you know what card is the next big thing? QS has a proven track record for "beating the market" and getting you info on cards, long before they spike in price. [Click here to learn more about the Magic Card Market and how QS beats the public by hours or days.](#)

About Sigmund Ausfresser

Sigmund first started playing Magic when Visions was the newest set, back in 1997. Things were simpler back then. After playing casual Magic for about ten years, he tried his hand at competitive play. It took about two years before Sigmund starting taking down drafts. Since then, he moved his focus towards Legacy and MTG finance. Now that he's married and works full time, Sigmund enjoys the game by reading up on trends and using this knowledge in buying/selling cards.

@sigfig8 on Twitter

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The Art of Arbitrage

By Carl Szalich

A few months ago I was lucky enough to find three sealed booster boxes of Dissension for sale at a local hobby shop for a great deal at \$100 apiece, or \$115 after taxes.



I quickly looked up eBay selling prices on my iPhone and confirmed that, indeed, I should buy them right away.

So I did. I sold them later that day for \$150 each and made a cool \$105 profit.

How long after I bought them did I have them sold? About 5 minutes. I walked from the initial point of purchase one block down the road to another comic book store and had them out of my hands immediately.

This is a story of arbitrage.

What is Arbitrage?

According to Wikipedia, Arbitrage is defined as:

... The practice of taking advantage of a price difference between two or more markets: striking a combination of matching deals that capitalize upon the imbalance, the profit being the difference between the market prices. When used by academics, an arbitrage is a transaction that involves no negative cash flow at any probabilistic or temporal state and a positive cash flow in at least one state; in simple terms, it is the possibility of a risk-free profit at zero cost.

While my example above did not fit 100% to the description due to the fact that I had to act as a broker (middleman) instead of having the exchange happen directly between the two stores, the fact that I had backed up my purchase by verifying profits to be made in another market (in this case, eBay) allows it to still fall within that category. It still followed the basic structure of:

1. Find a product for sale at Market A
2. Determine that you can sell it for more at Market B
3. Buy from Market A and sell to Market B
4. Profit! (Market \$B – Market \$A)

Seems simple, right? For our purposes... IT IS!

(Disclaimer: Yes yes yes... we could go on about the futures market, exchange traded funds, and imbalances in currency rates, but we're talking small scale Magic Cards here, not the grain trade business. And this isn't meant to be a hardcore economics class, just a primer.)

How Can I Get In On This?!

Odds are, you probably already are and may not even realize it. There are a few generalized examples that I can think of that we all probably already engage in.

Online Buying, Local Selling

How many of you visit sites like eBay or MOTL, purchase cards there, and then re-sell them in your own hometown for a tidy profit? The online world is a vast, global economy that presents products for sale from various regions around the world at prices that may differ from your local market.

When you purchase those 4x Stromkirk Noble for \$16 online because you know that locally they sell for \$6-7 each, you are indirectly performing a type of arbitrage! Granted, there was risk involved (what if no one wants to buy them when they arrive?), but by finding a buyer BEFORE you make the purchase, you will have achieved true arbitrage.

Next time you have that player complaining about how they are priced out of Legacy because the local B&M (Brick and Mortar) store is charging \$65 for a Force of Will, there is no harm in asking: "Say, if I could get you a playset for \$220... would you be interested?".

If answer = YES, then:

Buy online for \$200

Sell to Player for \$220

Profit \$20*!

(* = Minus any fees)

In this example there was NO risk, as you already had a buyer for the product you were bringing in. If you can get a few people's want lists completed all at the same time, there is a huge potential for profit. So ask around, see what people need and are willing to pay, and compare what you can get them for to determine if it's worthwhile for you to buy it FOR them. With a tidy little cut for yourself, of course. :P

Buy -> Sell Lists

Another common example of arbitrage would be something that the guys here at QS are always advocating... taking advantage of discrepancies between store buy and sell lists.

Since buy / sell lists are public, you can scour all that you want for opportunities and make a few quick dollars in the process! All it takes is for you to be at a convention and see Store A selling their Cryptic Commands at \$8 and Store B buying at \$10 for you to profit from this model. As long as one vendor does not sell out and the other vendor continues to buy, you can repeat this process ad nauseam until your cabal coffers are full.

MTGO is another excellent resource to follow this model. As you'll primarily be dealing with bots, you can perform this buy / sell loop many more times in greater numbers.

Simple Trading

Trading in itself is a form of arbitrage. You and your trading partner can both be considered micro-markets, and the trade itself is an exchange of goods that results in loss, gain, or breakeven for one or both party members.

The wants/needs of the individuals will reflect the value of the goods being traded. And since an individual may value the goods more or less than the actual market, this allows us to profit due to the variance between perceived value and actual value.

We can take this a step further and actively solicit traders to determine their wants, trade for them from someone else, then re-trade them to the party who originally expressed interest for them to ensure that we make our “bottom line” in the deal.

This is especially useful when you find that one character who really, REALLY needs that 3rd Snapcaster Mage and you know someone who has one for trade at a lesser value than what your current partner is willing to pay.

Try and solidify a deal with a statement like: “Would you trade X for Y if I can get them for you? Could you hold Y for 15 minutes as I try and get you X?” There would be nothing worse than finally acquiring that Snapper just to have your original partner state that they no longer needed it.

Which bring us to...

Want to learn a little more on getting great deals? Check out this previously-locked Insider article!

[Insider: Value Is Not A Dirty Word](#)

Business Ventures

In pure arbitrage fashion, if your LGS (Local Gaming Store) is buying boxes for X and you can get them through your connections for Y, there may be room to discuss making the orders FOR your LGS!

This doesn't apply solely to boxes, of course... it applies to every aspect of business they may carry! Have a hook up for Perfect Fit card sleeves from Asia that they may not be able to order? If they want 100 packs for \$3 each and you can get them for \$2... that's \$100 (- fees) in your pocket!

Even if it's just an occasional or one time purchase like in the Perfect Fit example, it's worthwhile to build the business relationship for the future.

Perils and Pitfalls

While arbitrage is an excellent business model, there are still risks and expenses involved that could cost you and/or the other party involved time and money. Be sure to bear in mind the following considerations:

1) Shipping costs

If you have to pay to get product from point A to B, ensure that the shipping costs are not greater than your profit. In our Force of Will example, it would be pointless to buy @ \$200 and sell @ \$220 if shipping was \geq \$20. I was actually just burned on this, as I'd promised to ship 2x Foil Tarmogoyf registered to Singapore from Canada. I was going to make \$50 on the deal (- S&H), but it turns out registered shipping cost me \$45. Curse your antiquated postal system Canada Post!

So I made \$5 and considered it a lesson learned...

2) Auction Fees & Customs

Along the same line of shipping, if your fees are going to be greater than your profit, that defeats the entire purpose of the purchase.

3) Market Fluctuations & Changes in Demand

If the cards you've ordered increase or decrease in value while waiting for them to arrive, you could make a little more, but you are mostly concerned with the risk of losing. If we really want to have 0% risk, I advocate on solidifying a deal before ordering when this is a route that you're taking.

Going back to the 4x Stromkirk Noble for \$16 example: if, by the time they actually arrive in your town, the market for them has dried up or local values have come into line with the global market, you'll have a hard time selling them for profit if you didn't already have a pre-existing deal with someone. Cover your bases!

4) Responsibility

YOU are the one acting as a middle man. YOU are the one responsible to ensure that the end users are happy.

The onus of safe delivery lies on YOU, and no one else. So while there is much profit to be made, it would be at YOUR consequence should something go wrong. If you accept someone's \$24 for those Nobles (\$6 each) and the price spikes to \$8 each when you go home to buy (cost now = \$32 instead of \$16), YOU are the one out that \$8 (\$32-\$24) + shipping and fees.

A Free Lunch?

There is no such thing as free money. And while arbitrage is a nice way to protect your capital, it does come with its own risk and reward matrix like any other business venture. I hope that the tips and tricks that we've discussed today not only help you in your Magic deals, but also open your eyes to the vast possibilities that exist outside our cozy little niche market.

Hope you had a great New Years, everyone! Glad to see you here in 2012!

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About Carl Szalich

Currently found ranching Orggs in the wilds of London, Ontario, Canada, I've been playing MTG for the past 15 years. I remember when trading Dual Lands for Craw Wurms was the "in thing to do", and Shivan Dragon fought Royal Assassin to see which would carry the higher price tag. I'm primarily interested in MTG finance, and like a good Icatian Moneychanger I believe that we are all "bigger than we think" when it come to what we have, and what our potential may be.

Quiet Speculation has been helping gamers make more trades for **over two years** now. This subscription-based website unlocks the keys to how the Magic Card Market operates with daily articles on **hot cards**, **trading strategies** and **accurate predictions for the future**.

Would you like to...

- Buy a card for **\$5** and sell it two days later for **\$10**?
- Get **30% more value** in each and every trade you make in your binder?
- Learn of the eight nights a year when over **\$10,000** can change hands **in an hour in online trading**?
- Discover proven strategies for **avoiding the "ripcoff artists"** in your store while still getting the cards you need from them?
- Host your own game nights, **run an online store** or turn trading into revenue?

Since you answered YES!

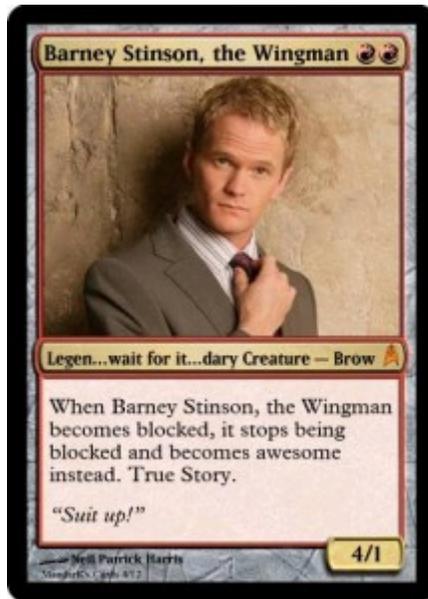
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The Wingman

By Chad Havas

One thing I've learned over the last decade is the value of a good wingman.



(Courtesy of Habibson @ Deviantart.com)

Having been “attached” for most of that time, I've developed a pretty good skill at it myself. But, not to worry, this isn't another dating article for Magic players (those never seem to go well, do they?).

I thought to write this article because over the last several days I've had lengthy chats with one of our subscribers and a good friend of mine, Joe (@SoupaJoeViola on Twitter).

We spent almost the entire weekend at the LGS, drafting, playing Magic and trading. At one point, our chats even brought about the concept of team trading, and, unrelatedly, what a wingman can do for a guy trying to catch a girl.

Let's restart. One thing I've learned over the last week is the value of a good wingman. Finding someone who complements your strengths and fills the gaps in your weaknesses is a great asset to a trader. My style is to target specific cards that I expect to see gains, and avoid cards I'm not sure I can easily move. For me, pairing up with people who are going to find undervalued gems in people's binders can help me finalize a trade that I might have settled on at a lower value.

Keep in mind, the wingman needs to be careful, as anyone who feels “tag-teamed” will surely walk away.

In dating, any old wingman won't do. [You need one who knows the role and how to execute it.](#) I'm going to follow the same form as the AskMen article and talk about 10 ways you can (or better yet, your friend can) help you maximize your trading time. So, a good wingman should:

10: Understand the Mission

Whatever this specific mission is depends on your goal as a trader. My personal goals are to get rid of cards in my binder for cards I think will hold value better or gain value over time.

I especially want to get rid of cards that have been rotting and taking up space.

A wingman needs to know what I'm shooting for and if they are going to help me accomplish it.

9: Keeps you Presentable

Not physically presentable, but psychologically. Trade partner becomes wary of your valuations? Wingman can make a very light comment supporting your values.

This is a key point. If your wingman is hovering too closely or being aggressive, they're going to do more harm than good. It's more "sellable" if the wingman is casually sitting next to you, perhaps scanning through his own trades/decks, rather than leaning over the trade space directly.

8: Understands your Language

I can copy this one almost directly from the dating article I linked above: "You've been in the trenches together. You know your wingman well, and he knows you well. You don't have to talk to communicate about every situation. He can read your body language, signs and codes, and act accordingly to help your cause."

This is important. When I was trading at the LGS this weekend, I was deep into a profitable trade. I had an opportunity to find another "throw-in" from my partner's binder and finalize the trade. I had already hit most of the cards I was interested in and didn't want to short change

myself with the final card I pulled. Joe noticed (either through my hesitation or body language) that I was unsure what to select from the binder. He said simply, "Oooh, that foil Unburial Rites looks sweet, maybe grab that?" Within moments, the deal was done, the trade partner didn't feel "ganged up on" and both parties left happy. I likely would have selected a lower valued card, as I wasn't sure exactly how much the foil trades at and I felt I already got the key cards I was looking for.

Joe calls this the "icing" but that's a whole different article.

7: Prevent Interference

Maybe your trade partner has his own wingman or buddy who is hovering or interfering with your trade. Your wingman should pull out his own binder and distract this person with a separate trade.

Keep them occupied enough not to interfere with business at hand. This isn't always necessary, and I don't condone trade practice that someone would object to anyway, but some people enjoy throwing wrenches in trades, and the wingman can attempt to redirect the attention of the problem friend.

6: Read the Terrain

This is how you and your wingman make value together. You both provide support to each other as wingmen. I know Joe especially likes foils, so if I see someone with a spicy foil, I'm going to let Joe know about it and facilitate an introduction between the two parties.

If Joe knows I'm looking to pick up specific uncommons (that I listed in last week's article) he'll let me know someone has Dismembers that they value around \$1 and I can seek them out.

5: Going Kamikaze

This has a slightly different meaning than it does in the dating realm. We're not suggesting he fires an assault at everyone in the room who has a binder just to gain information for you, but when you're in a trade, he has no purpose but to help you trade, and vice versa. If this means he loses a chance to trade with that person when you're done, so be it.

4: Big Ups to the Point Man

It's really important that your wingman does this only in the right spots. Again, an overzealous wingman will do more harm than good.

But if the trade talks get a little dicey, they will lighten the mood. They will talk positively about you throughout their own trades and help you network with trade partners. A good example, "Oh, you're building Deck ABC? You should talk to Chad after we're done, he's got experience with that deck and could probably help you finish it."

A statement like that automatically adds value to my trade with that person. If they come to the trade expecting to gain insight and information, in addition to cards, values are not going to be the focus of the conversation.

3: Fills the Gap

This is the one spot where I actually have to come up with my own, because "Taking the Ugly Friend" is not only a strategy I don't agree with, but doesn't apply to trading.

However, I will say, that on a rare occasion, working your wingman INTO your trade is possible. Maybe you and your partner can't agree on a fair deal. Let your wingman throw his binder in the mix and you two can hash out the difference later. I've used this in the past, and it tends to work out just fine.

2: Goes Undercover

This is less important in trading than dating but is worth a mention.

Smart traders keep their ears open to what people are looking for. If your wingman hears about something and you're better prepared to make a deal, relaying all the appropriate information to you before the trade can be extremely valuable.

If someone desperately needs a card, they may not offer that information voluntarily.

Even more valuable: if you know they need something but they don't know that you know!

1: Pumps You Up

Your wingman shares in your victories and encourages you to keep trading. Jokes, high-fives and feedback are all part of this process. Not to mention, it will be more enjoyable.

Find a wingman. Be a wingman. A trading team isn't as intimidating as it sounds, but the benefits are immediate and obvious.

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About Chad Havas

Chad has been with Quiet Speculation since January of 2011. He uses price speculation to cover all his costs to keep playing. Follow his journey from format to format and be prepared to make moves at the right times.

@torerotutor on Twitter

Why You Should Love Casual Magic

By Corbin Hosler

Every time you sit down to trade, you face a ton of decisions, often more than you face when playing a typical game of Magic. And what decisions you make matter. Trade or hold onto that Sorin, Lord of Innistrad? How many copies of Skaab Ruinator is too many? Is trading an Arid Mesa worth getting that Olivia Volderen?

The truth is most of you reading this site can hold your own on decisions like the ones above. But, if you're anything like me, you face an altogether different problem when you sit down at the table – staying up-to-date on all your prices.

This is a problem more than ever these days in this volatile market. What has Bloodline Keeper gone up to? Which Scars Dual Land is the flavor of the month right now, and how high has it gone? What's the latest card that Modern has spiked the price on?

In theory, it's easy to stay current on your prices. Just check the major sites, read the latest articles and spend enough time on the trading floor, and you'll know the prices, right?

If only it were that easy in the real world.

Here in the real world, things happen. The car breaks down, your kid gets sick, you take a night off of FNM to hang out with your girlfriend, or, God forbid, you have a career that

stops you from staying up-to-the-second in the Magic world. It can make it very difficult for players to stay in the game as they get older, and it's one reason why the attrition rate in Magic can seem higher as players skew older.

This effect also is clearly felt at the trading tables. Being behind just a week on your prices can be just as damaging as being behind a week on the latest Standard tech. If you're at a point in your life where it has become more difficult to keep up with daily price changes in cards, I have a strategy to share with you that revolutionized my trading methods, and most importantly, my profit margins.

Keeping It Casual

I did the “grab every Standard card” thing for awhile, and it worked out okay. But at times when I needed to cash out, it sucked to find out that the cards I traded for at their current prices had come down just a few short weeks later when I needed to sell. Even worse, I was getting much less in cash for them than I thought I would.

This was a frustrating experience, and I began to search for a better way. Of course I knew that Legacy cards were the place to be, but no one wanted to trade those away for my relatively small Standard collection, nor were there many players with these type of cards at my store.

What I did have was a group of extremely casual players who brought their “fun” decks to FNM and mostly just gave me free packs in Limited events. This was great for my

playing career but a little less lucrative for my trading endeavours.

One night something clicked as I was surfing buylists online (something I definitely had more time to do while I was in college). I realized that the Cauldron of Souls and Wilt-Leaf Lieges I had from random drafts were actually worth money! More importantly, it hit me that if I didn't know this, other people probably didn't either. And I was sold.

I realize this story seems a little naïve to us nowadays, but in the halcyon days of 2008 the truth is there was no focus on the financial side of Magic outside of the DailyMTG column "Building on a Budget," Quiet Speculation was just a seed of an idea in Kelly's mind, and EDH was being played in just a few hotel rooms across the country among judges.

What is the relevance of all this? Well, for me, it represented the day I learned that the "Casual" card was the place to be. Not only was the buylist value better on these cards, but they were much easier to acquire!

From then on, my goals shifted to picking up these types of cards and just trading for the things I needed for my own decks. Over time, as I began to care less about Standard and learned the wonders of having friends who will loan you cards, I began to focus even more exclusively on these cards.

Now let's step out of the past and come back to now. Everything I learned in 2008 is just as true today as it was then. There have been some changes along the way, most notably the explosion of EDH and the rise in knowledge

regarding prices, but the basic tenets are the same. Casual cards are worth more than ever, and you will still find them very cheaply in trade.

With that in mind, we can feel comfortable targeting these cards in trades (as I am sure many of you do), but there is an even bigger benefit to this fact that we haven't touched on yet.

Remember above where I mentioned the negative implications that time constraints have on trading? Well, one of the best things about targeting casual cards in trades is that the prices are very stable (which is why you get a better buy price on them). Nicol Bolas, Planeswalker has been \$15-20 forever and will likely stay that way. Mill cards like Glimpse the Unthinkable are always going to be popular. And Planeswalkers, even unplayed ones like Sarkhan Vol, will retain value.

So what qualifies as a "casual card?" Let's break down some of the major archetypes.

Mill

Mind Funeral retails for \$3-4 and Archive Trap is \$2. These cards are played in zero competitive decks, but still hold their value. These were even more popular before Commander became a thing, but as you can see, they still stand the test of time. This is why I really like grabbing Increasing Confusion as a throw-in over the next year, because you can get them as handouts and they'll likely stay upwards of \$2 forever.

Angels/Dragons

This is something that was much more prevalent in the past but still exists today. I've had players come up to me and ask me to trade them every Dragon I own, and Mark Rosewater recently said that they try to always make these because they are one of the most popular creature types.

At the Dark Ascension Prerelease (where I went 10-0-1 over two events), a new player asked me if they put a Dragon in every set after seeing some older ones in my binder. When I told him yes, he got excited to start collecting them. That's the effect these things have, for whatever reason.

The real move in picking these up is getting the Mythics, because that's where the most money will always lie. For instance, Bogarden Hellkite and Hellkite Overlord are worth \$3-5 despite being nothing but a casual card. It's also why I like picking up Angelic Overseer and Moonveil Dragon as throw-ins right now.

Elves/Token Generators

Immaculate Magistrate is worth \$5 despite seeing a reprint already. Elvish Promenade is a \$3 uncommon, and we all know about the \$25 Doubling Season.

For whatever reason, people love Elves. Elvish Champion and Elvish Piper are stupid expensive for what they are and always trade very easily. It also helps that Elves and Tokens overlap pretty heavily.

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Commander

This particular category is no secret and has been beat to death. What's especially important to note is that, even though something like Jhoira of the Ghitu is a solid \$4, the foil version is more than seven times that. Popular Commanders and other staples of the format are insane pickups in foil if you can find any.

Of course, you can still find other random cards that aren't Commanders, like Coalition Relic, that retail for good prices (\$4, despite a reprint in the case of the Relic) and still have the insane foil prices (\$25 for Relic).

This makes something like Parallel Lives a good choice right now, though it will probably take a while, both due to Doubling Season already existing and the sheer bulk of Innistrad packs that were cracked.

Black/White Cards

This is randomly a very popular casual color combination. Fetid Heath is worth real money and Deathbringer Liege is too, not to mention Commander staple Divinity of Pride.

It's not the biggest factor in the world, but keep this in mind while you are digging through collections. People still don't realize that Stillmoon Cavalier goes for \$8 on SCG.

I've been teased in the past for my love of cards like Adaptive Automation (\$4) and Captivating Vampire (\$4), but these are the cards I make most of my money in Magic off of. When I sell cards, I usually am able to pull dozens of things these out of my binder and make a few hundred dollars without ever touching the larger-ticket items. This allows me to grow my collection with the truly difficult-to-acquire cards like Dual Lands and next-tier things like Mutavaults, not to mention the nearly-75 Zendikar Fetchlands I have, while still making real money selling cards.

Until next week, keep it casual!

About Corbin Hosler

Corbin Hosler is a journalist living in Norman, Oklahoma (also known as the hotbed of Magic). He started playing in Shadowmoor and chased the Pro Tour dream for a few years, culminating in a Star City Games Legacy Open finals appearance in 2011 before deciding to turn to trading and speculation full-time. He writes weekly at Quiet Speculation and biweekly for LegitMTG. He also cohosts Brainstorm Brewery, the only financial podcast on the net. He can best be reached @Chosler88 on Twitter.

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Banned! Or How to Make 200 Tix in 5 Minutes [MTGO]

By Patrick McGregor

One of the biggest price fluctuations in Magic comes from the banning of cards.

It is different from new cards being released because there are no spoilers. There is often a lot of conjecture by various strategy writers, but nothing concrete until that fateful midnight when the Wizards groundhog comes out and we find out if it's 3 more months of combo winter.

Besides breathing life back into whatever stale format the bannings were a result of, there is quite a bit of quick money to be made from this. Below are the main ways to take financial advantage of this somewhat rare occurrence in Magic. Some of the information will be universal to paper and MTGO while the rest will be strictly MTGO.

What To Do When a Banning Occurs:

1) Buy all of the cards that get better by the banning.

The money making process starts far before the night of the bannings.

It starts once legitimate chatter begins about cards being too good. This does not mean people whining in random forums. Generally, several writers are talking about how a strategy is too good, or it just dominating for a long time. If both Gerry Thompson and Patrick Chapin are saying something is wrong with standard chances are the jig is up and you need to start planning what to do.

First, make a list of all the strategies the cards (or deck) in question has oppressed. Look at the effect the cards had on the format and plan accordingly. If the banned cards pushed control decks over the top, then aggro and combo will generally have been oppressed. If the card was some sort of degenerate engine (Survival, Mystical) it probably pushed all of the slower decks that could not cope with a format that turned the format into a "race this deck or play this deck" mentality.

A hypothetical case of this is Vengevine decks in Standard. People were very excited about all of the neat interactions, but, inevitability, it quickly became apparent that none of the tricks were relevant when you could do nothing about getting Valakutted out.

I didn't really expect Valakut to get banned, but I was still was ready at my computer every time a new ban list came out (just in case) so I could pounce on the angriest vegetable ever conceived.

A real case came when Stoneforge Mystic and Jace were banned. This broke Caw Blade's choke hold on the format and allowed oppressed decks that simply couldn't compete back into the limelight.

In Caw Blade's case, the oppressed individual was Valakut.

Valakut was a pillar of the format before Jace married The Little Kor that Could. The clock and disruption just came online just a little too quickly when you were getting clocked and forced to discard, so Valakut's traditional plan of going over the top of control just didn't work anymore.

This meant that prices on Primeval Titan and Avenger were very low.

These were at the top of my buy list.

Once the banning hits, the goal is to buy up as many of the mythic rares (and to some extent the normal ones) as possible. In Primeval Titans case, he went from 9-11 to 16-18 in the 24 hours after the banning. The nice part is that most of the bots will still be full of the card, so chances are you will get to snap up copious amounts of it in a short while. Others will also be doing this, so you have to act quickly.

After you have all these newly mint mythics you have to make a decision on when to get out. Generally the hype will drive the card up very high before any major tournaments occur. I sell at this point because the prices do not usually go much higher, even if the card is tournament worthy. However, if it turns out that it was all hype and the bannings did not kill the dominant deck, the bubble will pop quickly and send the cards back down to their previous prices.

The next source of profit comes from buying up the card that actually got banned. This sounds insane, but is actually very profitable.

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2) Buy banned cards:

Most people on MTGO go completely insane when a banning occurs. Fear of losing value lends people to start trying to get rid of their newly banned cards as quickly as possible.

People will just start posting in the classifieds at a price that is generally too high and slowly lower the number as their cards don't sell. A lot of people use major bot selling prices or just look at similar classified sales.

The way to make a profit on this is through capitalizing on people's laziness in not looking at bots' updated prices.

Bots do not get the luxury of reading articles or knowing things are banned. They go off of a simple supply and demand equation. All of the well-known bots will change their buy prices very quickly, as the vast majority of people will sell to them. Cardbot is not where you are making your money with bannings.

Start out by making a bot list. A bot list is a quick reference sheet that can be used when you need to either buy or sell a large amount of cards in a short period of time. It should guide you in your transactions to figure out who will most likely have good prices and stock of the card.

Make a spreadsheet of various bots, specifically chain bots (bots that let you use credit at multiple of their stores). Note their card availability, buy amounts (4 of or as many as you have), what formats of cards they carry (Modern, Legacy, Standard), their prices compared to the major bots, and their general margins. Try to hit bots that are not mainstream. This process can be time consuming depending on how in depth you want your bot analysis, but is definitely worth it in the end.

Here is an example of what it would look like for cardbots buying and selling accounts.

Name	Type	Accounts	Format	Sell amount	Update	Price
Cardbot	Selling	5	All	4	Quick	Very good
Name	Type	Accounts	Format	Buy amount	Update	Price
Cardbuyingbot	Buying	4	All	4	Quick	Very good

Now you are ready to take advantage of some banned cards.

Start by typing the name of the card into the classifieds and see who is still advertising buying or selling it at the old price. Once all those avenues are filled, use your previously

created bot list to see if you can find some hidden bots that have not updated.

It may take a little time, but you can typically find a bot still buying at the old price.

Once you find a bot that is buying at the old price, you have to determine if its buy price is significantly different from the average classified sell price of the Chicken Littles trying to sell by posting in the classifieds.

If a significant difference exists, start buying up copies. Then immediately sell them to the bot. For Jace I was buying for between 50 and 55 and selling at 60. This netted between 5 and 10 tix per transaction, totalling about 200 tickets after I ran a 3 account bot out of 2400 tickets.

I wound up stopping after this because I had to wake up early the next morning, but I have no doubt I could have kept at it and netted hundreds of tickets from even more bots.

3) Tips for buying up cards when a banning occurs:

Do not try to undercut people by too much. I saw people advertising buying Jace at ten tickets. The card was set up to be a possible pillar of Extended, Modern or Legacy, as well as the most iconic card in Magic. If there was hidden information of some sort, then maybe a ploy like this would work, but when you are offering 10 for a card and others are offering 30-50, don't even waste your time.

Turn the cards around immediately after getting them from people. You do not want to do a mass buy of the banned cards only to be followed by having no buyer because all the bots have been updated.

If the banned card has multiple application outside of the format it was banned from, watch it. When the Jace market dropped off and the bots filled up, people foolishly began trying to get rid of their Jaces at any cost. It was still (hypothetically) going to be a huge card in Modern, so it was a good buy if you could get them for less than 20.

In Review: The Main Points

- Make a list of cards that will increase in value because they are no longer being kept down by the newly banned card.
- Make a bot list so you will be aware of bots who hadn't gotten the memo.
- Act quickly. For every hour after the banning, more people will have flooded the bot market with banned cards, making it less likely to find a bot still buying at old prices.
- If the card in question has applications outside of the format it was banned from, snatch them up if they go low enough.

I hope this helps some of you uncover the profitable things to be done when Wizards slams down the ol bannhammer. This will be relevant in a few months when Modern gets its legs, as Wizards has been going ban crazy in that format.

Pat McGregor

@SARCASTO on MTGO

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