Card Corner: What are regionals?



Pokémon cards laid out across the table. This is one of the most recognizable brands of playing card.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FLICKR

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In any competitive trading card game (TCG), tournaments are held throughout the world to see who the best player is. These tournaments are designed to challenge the competition within a local region, eventually leading to qualification for a larger, worldwide tournament.

With that said, these tournaments are home to much more than just some fierce competition: They're an amazing place to make friends, win prizes and have fun!

Last weekend, I attended Pokémon's Baltimore regional and realized how much there truly is to do at one of these events. Welcome to the Card Corner, my fortnightly column where I talk about TCGs! Today I'll be explaining to you everything you can do at a regional.

Most TCG's follow a similar format to their events, so even if you're not a Pokémon player, this article will still apply to you.

The main event begins on Saturday, with eight to nine Swiss rounds. For those unfamiliar, a Swiss tournament format constantly matches the top players against each other, ruthlessly finding who the best player is in the least amount of time.

For example, after two rounds of play, players who are 2-0 will be matched against others with the same record. The pattern continues until 8 rounds have been played.

At the end of the open stage, players who have more than two losses are eliminated from the competition. This usually leaves around 500 participants for the second day of competition on Sunday.

The Swiss format continues until a clear top 8 players have emerged. They are then placed into a March Madness style bracket, eliminating players until one comes home with the title.

> "(Tournaments) are an amazing place to make friends, win prizes and have fun!"

If you're like me, there is relatively little hope of winning the entire tournament, but fear not! Regionals aren't just about seeing who's the best, they're also about bringing together a community of TCG players to have fun. This is where side events enter the picture.

Side events are lower stakes games you can play with friends or random people. They consist of many ways to play the TCG, including non-standard alternate formats like Build and Battle, also known as Draft in other TCGs. Depending on how well you perform in your group, you'll be rewarded with a certain number of prize tickets. Similar to an arcade, you can take your tickets to the prize wall and redeem them for fun items like cards, plushies, backpacks and more!

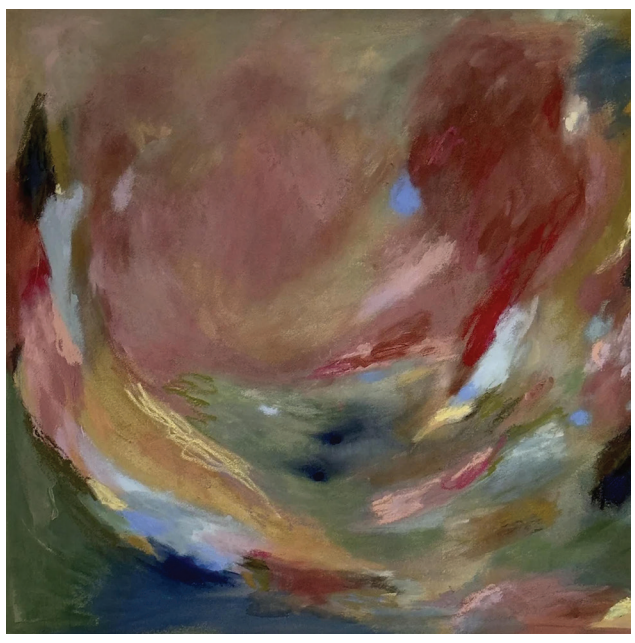
After I went 1-3-1 in the main tournament, I began playing side events with my friends. I gained 220 prize tickets, allowing me to cash them in for a playmat and some Destined Rivals booster packs!

After satiating your TCG playing desires with side events, you can stroll around and do some shopping at the vendors that line the walls of the convention center.

With an official merchandise stand and third-party sellers everywhere, you're certain to find something that you'll enjoy — whether it be a card you've been hunting, or a plushy you never knew you needed.

Regionals are an amazing place to come together as a TCG community and have some fun. Whether you're a veteran player who lives for the thrill of competition, or someone newer to the scene that just wants to make friends and spend too much money, regionals are an amazing experience that I believe every TCG player should experience at least once.

On the next edition of the Card Corner, we'll be exploring more about the community of TCGs and why they're such a great outlet for competition and community building. Until then, have a great week all!



Lizzy McAlpine's new album Angel is her fourth studio album with 14 tracks. This album cover is the first for Alpine to not feature her likeness.

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TENDER LOVE SONGS PERMEATE LIZZY MCALPINE'S 'ANGEL'

by Elijah Polance
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Of the many emerging stars defining the mainstream appeal of indie folk, few are as recognizable as Lizzy McAlpine. Her style, evident in her 2022 hit "ceilings," cleverly interweaves folk ballad instrumentation with pop song structures. The combination makes the sad sound catchy.

McAlpine returns to her songwriting tradition on "Angel," released on Friday, Sept. 18. The hourlong record predominantly moves through different perspectives of love — often the unrequited or post-breakup kind, but there's some mid-relationship connection on display as well.

The opener and lead single, "The light in the painting," begins softly, taking nearly two minutes for the instrumental palette to expand beyond a backing organ. The acoustic guitar and piano melody build a soft world around a romantic partner McAlpine sings of. A second sonic explosion with drums ensues after McAlpine's realization that "If somewhere there is a heaven / This is as close as I will get," which gives way to a lush and warm ending.

In the ensuing "Anybody's fool," there's a wandering ambiance created by the drifting piano notes alongside a faint drum thumping in the background. The slow pace and McAlpine's singing echoes the tone of the slower ballads off Phoebe Bridger's album "Punisher."

But unlike Bridgers' work, McAlpine navigates similar themes with some lyrical clunkiness. Each chorus opens with the predictable "I know this is right and I know that it's sad / Want you to want me again like that." But McAlpine scrapes at some complexity once the centerpiece, "I like the way it feels to not be anybody's fool," comes into play.

McAlpine hits a pleasant stride, and possibly the most mesmerizing on the album, on "A car wash and a new pair of pants." McAlpine refuses to commit to any specific singing, choosing to instead wander in and out of natural speech and vocal melodies. It adds a unique sense of whimsy to a track that already has drums and acoustic guitars jumping in and out of the main melody.

A few tracks later, "The moon" comes in with a similar airy energy. McAlpine muses about connecting with someone in a sustainable way, but the speaker, a "maiden fair" compared to the "handsome prince," finds herself bound to her lover and "no freer than the moon." The breakdown into panned "oohs" in the middle and outro helps elevate the playful feel.

Of all the love songs, "Our strange ways" has the most overt narrative. With a length of seven-and-a-half minutes, it's the longest track in McAlpine's catalog. The first verse focuses on the speaker's disorientation after a breakup, while the second verse focuses on the imagined life lived by her partner afterward. A refrain of "A world without you" washes over the listener before a brief outro vignette that sounds like a piano-led demo.

Some of the most memorable moments come when McAlpine shifts the subject matter. "Soldier of the road" dwells on the unspoken connections between a traveling musician and a soldier. The track features the indie folk band Fleet Foxes, where frontman Robin Pecknold's voice merges comfortably with McAlpine's. It's a fitting appearance considering how the twangy guitars and pastoral atmosphere echo the sound of Fleet Foxes' self-titled debut record.

The twelfth track, "Mason's song," focuses on long-term platonic connection, with a handful of collaborators (including producer and performer Mason Stoops) joining for the outro call of: "I can't do it alone." It's followed by the heartwarming "The crowd," a piano ballad that pays homage to McAlpine's late father.

On "Angel," McAlpine's sound is as refreshing as ever, but the insistence on love tracks can get a bit old. Still, the overwhelmingly gentle feel and moments of belted catharsis on tracks like "Peach" and "Ugly things" prevents any overbearing monotony.

Rating: 3.25/5



Lizzy McAlpine performs on stage with her acoustic guitar. Her hit "Ceilings" skyrocketed her fame.

PHOTO COURTESY OF @LIZZYMCALPINE ON INSTAGRAM